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Lawless, Money-Hungry Nevada in the 1860's

ANN CARMENY

HOFFMAN BIRNEY



ANN CARMENY—

as vital, brave and beautiful as the wild young West where she was stranded by her father's death.

JESS MINOR—

professional gambler, a man of many moods and talents, who took his women casually—until he met Ann Carmeny.

Their tempestuous story vibrates through this novel of gunmen and gamblers, miners and ranchers, vigilantes and Saints, hard-working wives and honkytonk girls who migrated West and built an empire with cattle and gold.

ANN



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CARMENY

By Hoffman Birney

ANN CARMENY

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AGAIN, TO MARGUERITE

I. ANN CARMENY

Chapter I

I

THE ROAD along the course of Strawberry Creek, where the California Trail left the Sweetwater River, had been badly eroded, and Peter Carmeny worked shoulder to shoulder with the younger men of the train, matching their every stroke with ax and pick and shovel. He collapsed at Pacific Springs on the western slope of South Pass, and when the train camped the following night at the crossing of the Little Sandy he lay tossing on the bed which Ann had made for him in the wagon. He mumbled irrationally of Painesville and his neighbors there and failed to recognize Stephen Yerkes, captain of the train, and the other men who visited his wagon and stared gravely at him.

The caravan lay over for a full twenty-four hours at the Little Sandy, partly for Peter Carmeny's sake, partly to rest horses and oxen before essaying the dry haul of forty-four miles on Sublette's Cutoff to the crossing of Green River.

"We want to do what's right, Miss Ann," Yerkes said after visiting the Carmeny wagon for the second time, "but your pa looks bad. He needs a doctor; and I've been talking to Mellish, and he says there ain't one chance in a million of finding one at Fort Hall—nobody goes there now but stray trappers and such folk. Ain't that so, Mellish?"

The guide nodded.

"An' mebbe some fellers lookin' f'r emigrators t' Oregon over th' Snake River Road," he added. "They ain't fitten t' doctor a colicky hoss. At Great Salt Lake—"

"Not there!" Ann exclaimed. Yerkes recognized the fear in her voice.

"Now, Miss Ann, I've heard all th' stories about the Mormons that you have and a lot more that ain't fit for a young girl's

ears, and I'm not believing more than half of the half of them. Mormons are folks, in spite of what kind of religion they might happen to believe in, and they're not bothering a sick man and his daughter. You've got two good men in Larsen and Talbot—I've been talking with them, and they'll both see you through to Great Salt Lake City. 'Nother thing, there's two trains only a couple of days behind us. One of them's Mormon converts, and the other is emigrators bound for California. You'd best wait for them. If your pa is still ailing when the Mormons get here you can go on with them; and if he's feeling better you can lay over till the second train gets here and join up with them. Shucks, Miss Ann, you're likely to catch up with us before we get to the Sink of the Humboldt."

"I'll have to think it over." Ann Carmeny was not deceived by the forced cheerfulness.

"There ain't much to think about or much time to do it in. We're pulling out in the morning over forty-four miles of desert to Green River. Your pa wouldn't make it, not in the shape he's in now. You'll have to wait."

He did not wait for a reply, but turned and walked toward his own camp. The guide, Mellish, followed him.

The sun was high over the distant mountains before the last wagon of the long train had vanished into the smoky dust. Yerkes stamped back and forth, reminding all that forty-four miles of desert lay between them and the next water except that to be found at the Big Sandy, only eight miles beyond; but the news that Peter Carmeny and his daughter were remaining behind spread to all the wagons, and no woman of the train would leave until she had bade Ann good-by. Mrs. Purvis, alone except for the hired men, who would not be paid until they delivered her safely to her husband in Sacramento, bowed stiffly and waved a mittened hand from the high seat of her wagon, but the other women walked to the Carmeny camp, their children beside them, and tried, each in her own fashion, to reassure the still-faced girl. Many were prepared already for the weariness which was certain to overtake the draft animals and compel all members

of the train to walk. They had girded their skirts almost to their knees, revealing stout legs and thin legs, columns and shanks, in white and black and striped cotton stockings and in knitted wool.

"They tell me that it'll be worse today than on the Sweetwater below Devil's Gate," said fat Mrs. Eyston, herself stronger than half the men in the party. "You're in luck, Annie; I wish we were takin' the Salt Lake road instead of this here cutoff. Good-by, dearie, and God bless you."

"Your pa will be all right." This was Stephen Yerkes's wife, who talked hurriedly and watched her impatient husband. "It's just a touch of this here mountain fever. Soon's we're gone, Ann, dose him with sage tea and put just a mite of flaxseed in it. Good-by."

Good-by . . . good-by and God bless you . . . good-by. Don't believe all them stories about the Mormons, dearie; folks just tell 'em to scare us emigrators and make us take the northern road. . . . Good-by . . . I'm sorry I'm cryin', Annie, but I can't help it. My own sister's boy started for Californy in '56, and they've never heard of him since a letter that said he was in Great Salt Lake City and was goin' on when spring come. You keep to your wagon, Annie, and don't even pass the time of day with them Mormons, man or woman. . . . Good-by . . . God bless you. . . . Good-by, Mrs. Arnold and Mrs. Wolfenden, and the baby is certainly thriving on the trip, isn't he? And good-by, Mrs. Clark and Mrs. Maybeck, and we'll see all of you in California. Good-by, Mrs. Kane and Mrs. Stadler. Good-by . . . God bless you. . . . Good-by.

Jefferson Crittenden waited until the last of the women was hurrying to overtake the wagons, already laboring through sand that covered the felloes and trickled in dry rain from the rising spokes. Jeff was a Virginian, slow-moving, with dark brown languorous eyes under long silky lashes, and unspeakably lazy except when on horseback. Then he was a laughing centaur, dashing and graceful, whose horsemanship shamed that of the plainsmen and the young Indian bucks at Laramie and the other forts along the Platte and made plowboys of the soldiers

who rode to the emigrant camps to show off before the girls of the caravan. He had spent many hours before the Carmeny fire, talking in low tones with Ann and listening attentively when Peter Carmeny spoke. Peter did not like him. There was a war, Peter maintained. It was a rebellion, and the Union forces would crush the southern upstarts and nigger-drivers; but this young Crittenden was a Virginian, and he should be loyal to his birth-place and his people. He should be carrying a musket, not driving an ox team across the plains for that old hen, Mrs. Purvis.

"Now hush, papa," Ann said as Peter grumbled. "There's men here no older than Jeff that some folks would say ought to be fighting with the North. Jeff don't talk much about himself—maybe he's got a good reason for not being with the army."

"Yeah," her father snorted, "a good one. Same kind of a good one that lots of fellows had for goin' to Texas and New Mexico in '47 and '48. We'd whipped the Mexicans by then, and there wasn't any chance of landing in a lousy Mexican jail and laying there for ten years. I'd not need many guesses to tell you Jeff's reasons for being California bound."

Ann liked Crittenden, however. There was a quiet deference in his attitude toward women which the men from Pennsylvania and Ohio and Illinois lacked. Even with Mrs. Purvis he seemed never to lose his temper, even when her tongue clacked on interminably with shrewish criticism of his ability to handle her oxen, on the excessive care he lavished on his own horse, on the quantity of food he consumed, and on the condition of the road. Above all, on the condition of the road along the Platte and the Sweetwater and to the Continental Divide at Great South Pass.

"They ought to do something about it instead of wasting taxpayer's good money in fighting a lot of worthless rebels. If the Confed'rates want to have their own country, let 'em have it. They'll all of them be starving to death in ten years, being too lazy to work, and then you'll see them whining to get back in the Union again."

"Yes, ma'am," Jeff drawled, "but you see they are a-fightin', an' that's why there's no regular troops here along the Overland. Only these Ohio militiamen and such."

Toward the younger women Jeff's attitude was one of respectful adoration. Ann, being wholly ignorant of men and with a biological knowledge limited to a few vague suspicions, did not know that the sleepy eyes appraised every woman, young or old, married or unmarried, white, black, or red, upon whom they rested. There were, to Jeff Crittenden, only two classes of women, those who did and those who did not. Within the first classification he placed those who might when properly approached or encouraged. His was an elastic code which he never attempted to analyze or define. He would pay a gambling debt and evade any other financial obligation, he was truthful except when a lie would better serve him, he revered all white women of his own or a higher station unless they aroused his easily stimulated desire, and his morals were those of the rabbit or the barnyard cock. When Yerkes prepared the roll of all members of the train and their vocations, Jefferson Crittenden called himself a gentleman.

He rode the thoroughbred he called Billy Bay—proof that the visit to the Carmeny wagon was one of ceremony, for the horse ordinarily traveled with the loose stock, unburdened by saddle or pack. At night Jeff Crittenden carried his blankets to some point beyond the limits of the camp and slept with Billy Bay's stake-rope around his body. The stallion could give any other horse in the train a running start and beat him handily over any distance greater than half a mile. There were members of an Ohio cavalry regiment, stationed at one of the Platte forts, who would long remember Billy Bay and his rider. Traders who followed the course of the Overland would find few sales there; few to buy new Colt revolvers or hats or clothing warmer and better made than the supplies which were supposed to reach the quartermaster with some regularity but which were usually diverted to the armies in the South. There was a corporal in one of the cavalry companies who had been a jockey, a lieutenant who owned a racehorse, and many officers and men who believed that horse could outrun any animal between St. Joe and the Pacific. Billy Bay had crossed the finish line three lengths in the lead with Jeff Crittenden looking back over his shoulder and

laughing through the dust at the corporal and his whip. There had been less criticism of Jeff since that day. Men are not harsh toward one who puts money—good gold as well as depreciated greenbacks—in their pockets. There would be other racehorses, they said, at Fort Hall and at the Carson River and California settlements; racehorses and men willing to back them. No animal in the train was guarded more zealously than Billy Bay, and there were plenty to volunteer to share Jeff's nightly vigils against thieving Indians or whites to whom the blood-bay stallion would prove a gold mine.

"John Thorne's driving Mis' Purvis, Miss Ann," said Jeff. "I couldn't go on without sayin' good-by to you."

"That's nice of you, Jeff. I hate to think of separating, even for a little while, from the friends I have made." She noticed that he had shaved his cheeks and had combed and pomaded his brown mustache. His broad hat was caught up, rakishly, by a buckskin thong which passed through brim and crown. Some of the cavalry officers had worn their hats in that fashion, and a cavalry officer had once owned the deep-cuffed gauntlets which Jeff wore.

"... But we'll all meet again in California," she continued. "It won't be for long."

"It might be longer than you think," he said. "Maybe I'm not going to California, Miss Ann."

"Not going—why, Jeff!"

"No'm. I've been talking with Mellish and with men I've met along the road—like that old trapper at Laramie. California's played out if a man has any notion of making big money in a hurry in the mines. They talk of the Comstock and how rich it is; but the good ground there is all taken, and all that a man like me could get would be day work swingin' a pick. They're farmin' in the Sacramento valley and down south—but I made up my mind when I left Virginia that I'd stood between my last pair of plow handles."

"But Mrs. Purvis—"

"I know. You're thinkin' that she's not goin' to pay me or John Thorne until after we get her to California. Let her keep

the money. I don't have to think about that any more. I run Billy Bay at St. Joe and at Fort Kearny and again at Laramie. What with my winnings and what other fellows that won have given me, I can laugh at Mis' Purvis."

He hitched the wide belt, stitched with red and green silk, that slanted across his hips. A long-barreled Colt revolver hung against his right thigh, and she saw that he had tied down the holster with a thong about his leg. Some men did that when riding to prevent the heavy weapon from leaping and slamming against them with the motion of the horse; others—like that horrible man at the stage station at the forks of the Platte—tied down their weapons to permit a more rapid draw. They were fighters, killers. The man at Platte Forks was famous all along the Overland Road. His name was Slade, and once he had been in charge of a division for the stage company but had been discharged for habitual drunkenness. He had killed a man at Julesburg on the South Platte: had tied him to a post in the corral and there pistoled him to death while the victim writhed and screamed and begged for mercy. More, he had cut off the dead man's ears and now carried them, dried, in his pocket. The story was known from St. Joseph to Sacramento and was told to every emigrant. But Jeff Crittenden couldn't become a man like Slade; he was a gentleman, not a swaggering drunken bully. His brown eyes were like a hound's, melting and tender. Even animals loved him—look how the bay stallion pawed the ground, pretended to shy, and then nuzzled Jeff's arm.

"Money's good to have, Jeff," she heard herself saying, "but it isn't everything."

"It's 'most everything," he said stubbornly. "Listen, Ann—can I call you Ann, please?" She nodded and he went on: "I know what the people of this train are saying about me. I'm Southern—Virginian—and they're sayin' that if I believe in what the South is fightin' for I ought to be back there with the army of my state. When some of these Yankee nigger-lovers start talkin' 'bout slavery, I ask them if they've ever seen slaves in Virginia and the Carolinas. They're a sight better off than free Yankees in the mills in Massachusetts."

"I didn't know you'd ever lived north, Jeff."

"I've heard 'bout how things are up there," he said. "An' what's more, I've seen fightin', too. Not much, maybe, but more than some of the people that are talkin' so much. Some of them ought to be fightin' too—for the North—'stead of gettin' just as far away from the war as they can and huntin' for an easy life in California."

He flung his hands wide in a protesting gesture, and the bay stallion squealed and shied. The last of the wagons had disappeared now: their course was marked only by the cloud of red-brown dust, stirred up by hundreds of plodding hoofs and slow-turning wheels, against the northwestern sky. John Larsen and Clem Talbot, her father's two men, returned from the grazing grounds in the creek bottom where they had been guarding the Carmeny cattle against mingling with those of the emigrant train and trailing with them toward Green River. The two men drank at the keg. Crittenden and Ann were standing scarcely a dozen feet away, but only Larsen seemed to be aware of the Virginian's presence. He jerked his head in the briefest of nods, then joined Talbot on the ground near the front wheel. The odor of tobacco reached Ann's nostrils. From within the wagon she heard her father move restlessly on his cot.

"From Cleveland it's twenty-two mile," he muttered, "and you got to go through . . ." the last word was unintelligible. Often those irrational mutterings were preliminary to spasms of protest when he threw his body from side to side and shouted incoherencies. Usually those attacks seized him only at night, when the fever mounted, and she waited tensely.

"The train's gone a long way, Jeff. I'm afraid you must hurry. I'm glad you came to say good-by to me—I'll miss you and all my old friends."

"I'm goin' to write you," he said suddenly. "I'll write you from Fort Hall and send the letter to the post office at Great Salt Lake City. I'll tell you what my plans are."

The mutterings of the sick man subsided.

"I'll be glad to hear from you, Jeff," she said honestly, "but I hope you'll tell me that you're going on, down the Humboldt

and over the mountains, with Mrs. Purvis. Papa had many letters from California before he decided to sell out his business and go there. You won't find that country so filled up that a young man can't get work."

She tried to withdraw her hand, but his grasp tightened.

"There's something I've got to tell you, Ann. You're not seeing the last of me here at the Little Sandy. I came west to make money, and I'm going to make it. Then, wherever you are, I'm comin' to find you!"

He captured her other hand and laughed as he felt her draw back.

"Jeff—"

Her voice was little more than a whisper, but as she spoke the gangling form of Clem Talbot appeared around the front of the wagon. Slim shavings dropped from a billet of kindling in his left hand; the right held a knife with a six-inch blade.

"Yore pa's breathin' kinda ha'sh-like, Miss Ann," he said in his flat Missouri drawl. "Mebbe ye'd better take a look an' see that he ain't chillin'."

Crittenden released her hands. She turned, and her skirts swept the dust over the Virginian's boots. One hand clutched those skirts, raising them to the tops of her laced shoes—the limit of modesty—as she scaled the ladder placed at the lowered tail gate.

"Good-by, Jeff."

"Good-by, Ann." Crittenden seemed undisturbed by the interruption. He swung to the saddle as Billy Bay pranced and curvetted, then bowed low over the saddle horn. "I'm goin' to write you. Don't frget to go to the post office after the letter."

He loosed the rein, and the stallion swept away at his matchless gallop. Ann disappeared within the wagon and found her father sleeping quietly. Clem Talbot turned to where his companion, Larsen, dozed beside the wheel.

"I take it he's left," said Larsen.

"Yep." Talbot balanced the heavy-bladed knife on the palm of his hand. Twenty feet from where he stood a magpie swept down to investigate the rubbish around the dead campfire. Tal-

bot's hand moved in a quick, flickering motion. The frightened bird spread its wings, but before it could take flight the blade pinned it to the ground.

"Called me a Missouri puke once, he did," said Talbot. He retrieved the knife and wiped the blade on his trousers.

2

The trains of which Stephen Yerkes had spoken did not arrive at the Little Sandy until late in the afternoon of the fifth day. There had been a cloudburst in the hills, and flood waters had swept down a side ravine and rendered the narrow gorge near Devil's Gate impassable for wagons. The California-bound emigrants had overtaken the train of Mormon converts, and the men of both parties had labored together at cutting a new road along the flank of a steep hill. The emigrants had decided, Ann learned, to continue to Great Salt Lake City, and there rest their weary cattle and repair their wagons before undertaking the long journey down the Humboldt River and across the Carson Sink to the foot of the Sierras.

Peter Carmeny's condition showed little change. When fully conscious he complained of pain in limbs and joints and of intense fatigue.

"Seems like I sleep all th' time and can't get rested," he said.

Chills racked him at times, and their appearance was invariably a forerunner of fever in which he tossed restlessly and muttered incoherencies. Clem Talbot, with experience of the ague of the Kaw bottomlands where he had been born, suggested purgatives and drenching with sage tea and flaxseed as recommended by Mrs. Yerkes, but Ann could not see that those remedies effected any change, one way or the other, in her father's condition. There was no one with the emigrant train who assumed the slightest knowledge of medicine, nor could Ann feel any confidence in the decoctions of roots and herbs thrust upon her by the chattering women.

The Mormons had faith neither in drugs nor in doctors. She had hoped, though, that among the converts there might

be someone who had seen others suffering from the same ailment which had overtaken Peter Carmeny, who could tell her something of its course and probable duration, and who could suggest a logical treatment. There was none. A few of the converts were Americans, but the great majority was English with a handful of families drawn from the Scandinavian countries. She could understand the Danes and Jutlanders no more readily than the men and women from the Midlands or the whining voices of the Londoners. All were fanatical believers in the teachings of Joseph Smith as expounded by the missionaries who had told them of the new Zion arising beyond the Rocky Mountains. They—workers in the factories of Manchester and Leeds, dock laborers from Liverpool, barrowmen from Soho and Whitechapel, peasants on tiny farm holdings in Denmark where the cows shared the hut during the long winters—had been promised many acres in regions of surpassing fertility; they had been assured of individual salvation and of an eternity in a bourne where every man was priest and king. Other promises, less definite, had told them that beyond the grave the Gentiles of the world would be servants to those who had been baptized as Latter Day Saints. They listened to the sermons, and they believed every word and shadowy implication. Save that of apostasy, earth knew no sin blacker than that of disobedience to counsel. That, too, the converts knew and heeded. Disciplined soldiers could not have obeyed their officers more promptly than the slattern women and toil-broken men executed the orders of the elders who commanded the train.

There were three of those elders, and Ann met them all within an hour of the arrival of the Mormon train. One after the other trudged to her wagon with a curiosity natural to travelers to whom the sight of a single wagon, waiting beside the trail, was something more than an oddity. Each was kindly and solicitous on learning of Peter Carmeny's illness; each examined the sick man and offered to pray over him. Clem Talbot supervised the interviews. A Missourian, he hated Mormons with a hate only slightly less bitter than theirs for any and all Missourians.

Two of the elders were men well beyond middle age; their beards heavily salted with gray, their faces seamed. In their eyes a shrewd calculation tempered fanatic zeal. They assured Ann that they would be glad to escort her to Great Salt Lake City, their speeches were larded with blessings, but they missed none of the many details which showed as positively as a bank-book that Carmeny was a prosperous man. The Carmeny oxen were still fat; a reserve team grazed on the short grass; the well-built wagon was unshaken by the long haul along the Platte and the Sweetwater; two men had obviously been employed for the journey—and comparatively few of the emigrants to California were accompanied by hired hands. The elders asked God to bless the sick man and his daughter, and they departed, their shabby square-heeled boots scuffling through the sand. Clem Talbot spoke quietly to Ann.

"So happens, Miss Ann, that I know what's hid under the false bottom of th' seat box. Yore pa trusts me an' he told me. I'd make bold t' tell you that t' my mind th' less said 'bout it th' better."

"Thank you, Clem. I hadn't thought of mentioning it—but I certainly won't."

"Yes'm." He shifted his chew and spat a golden-yellow stream into the ashes of the cooking fire. "Y' know," he ruminated, "them Mormons don't use t'bacco, they don't drink tea n'r caw-fee, an' they don't tech likker. I allus thought that sort of thing was a man's own business—which it is—but when a whole tribe of men won't none of 'em smoke a pipe with ye by th' fire after th' work's done, 'r down a horn of drinkin' likker against th' night air, seems t' me there's somethin' unnacheral 'bout it."

The third elder could not count half the years of either of his fellows. He was bearded, but it was the sparse silky beard of youth that had scarcely become acquainted with a razor before it was permitted to grow. He shaved to the corners of his mouth, sparing only the upper lip and the chin. His mouth was sensitive and gentle, his cheeks were as pink as a girl's, and there was laughter—when he permitted it—in the blue eyes which ordinarily seemed detached from all the world. Not until he

spoke did Ann Carmeny realize why he had won over his own youth to a high place in the church and why his older companions regarded him so respectfully.

She had never heard such a voice. It was as rich and resonant as the bass strings of a harp. The Reverend McHale, minister of the Disciples' Church in Painesville, was supposed to have one of the finest pulpit voices outside of the great churches of New York and Philadelphia, but McHale was a frog compared to this young man. So was Mr. Ischam, lieutenant-governor of Ohio, whose oratory was credited with obtaining more recruits for the Union than any other medium in the state. Ischam was a pompous bladder of a man. He capitalized his voice, playing on it with studied skill, and the Reverend McHale was like him. She had heard them both, and she had seen and heard Mr. Edwin Booth when he played in Hamlet and in Richard III at the Cleveland theater. Strange, until she sat and heard the voice of Thomas Medbridge in the darkness she had not realized that words could be a caress as definite as the quick pressure of a friendly hand.

He came in the early evening. She and Talbot were in the wagon with Peter Carmeny, Larsen was washing the supper dishes. They could hear him grumbling that he had been hired to drive a team, not to do women's work, but the growls were punctuated with the sound of vigorous scrubbing and the sloshing of the rag in grease-scummed water. Peter's fever was rising. He muttered odd words and fragmentary sentences, and threw his head irritably from side to side on Talbot's breast, refusing to accept the bowl of broth which Ann held to his lips. It was then that the young Mormon stepped up the short ladder and entered the wagon.

"I am Elder Medbridge, Thomas Medbridge," he said. "Elder Scholl and Elder Dempsey told me of your troubles. I came to help."

Simple words, homely words. There was none of the unctuousness which had accompanied the parochial visits of Mr. Hurrell, the Baptist pastor in Painesville. Mr. Hurrell's voice boomed and rumbled like distant gunfire. "Ah, my dear young lady, we

missed you at worship last Sunday." He was a good man, Mr. Hurrell, and the ladies of the church admired his piety and his devotion to the fat and flabby Mrs. Hurrell and their three scrawny children. *If we were all alone*, thought Ann, *and he knew it and thought that I'd never tell on him he'd try to pinch me through my dress like that big oaf of a boy from Chardon tried to do at the picnic at Lake Grove; and I'd slap him harder than I did that boy, I think.*

To Thomas Medbridge women were his sisters in the gospel or in Christ. He could give them his blessing, could touch his lips to their foreheads or the crowns of their heads, as chastely and impersonally as an archbishop. He knew that as a speaker and exhorter he was far superior to other missionaries of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, but he would have laughed if he had been told that he played on his exquisite voice as skillfully as the great Ole Bull touched bow to strings. Then the laugh would have vanished, and he would have said that it was the spirit of God that was in him, the spirit that might descend upon any man if he would but accept Jesus Christ and the one true and everlasting gospel; if he would but recognize that the fullness of time was at hand and that Joseph Smith, martyred by the mobocrats of Carthage in '44, was the expounder of truth and the prophet of these latter days. Himself did more than believe those things, he knew them. They were truths as certain as the rising and the setting of the sun.

He touched Clem Talbot's shoulder, and the Missourian made place for him on the cot. Somehow—neither Clem nor Ann could explain the precise method of the accomplishment—Medbridge replaced Talbot and gathered Peter Carmeny's hot body to his own breast. He spoke to the sick man, and Peter's hands ceased their nervous plucking at the covers; he drank greedily when Medbridge held the bowl to his lips and within a few minutes was asleep. The missionary lowered him to the pillow, then followed Ann and the amazed Talbot out of the wagon.

"You—that was wonderful," the girl exclaimed. "He has not

eaten so well for several days—maybe the fever will break now. Oh, thank you so much!"

"He will sleep through the night," said Medbridge confidently. His eyes rested on her face. "You are tired yourself, Miss Carmeny."

"She oughta be," Talbot interjected. "She ain't slept more'n two hours at a stretch since her pa took sick."

"It's not as bad as that, really," she said quickly. "Clem and John Larsen help me with everything. If I look tired it's because I'm worried about papa—every night the fever seems to come up and burn away all the strength he has gained during the day."

"The broth will help him." His voice gave her assurance; in nothing that Thomas Medbridge said was there any speculation or any hint of personal doubt. "Elder Dempsey—he has made the journey before—tells me that tomorrow's drive is eighteen miles but that we will have a halting place, with water for our cattle, at the Big Sandy. The road is good and the traveling easy. You are going with us?"

"Yes." She hesitated and then added: "Clem talked with the captain of the California train, and we are falling in with them. There are doctors in Great Salt Lake City, and I must get papa to where he can have the right kind of care. How far is it to the city?"

Talbot, squatting by the fire, looked over his shoulder and up at them.

"Tain't stretched n'r shrunk a foot since th' last three times y' counted th' distance from th' guidebook, Miss Ann. Two hundred fifteen mile from where we're sittin' to th' Emigration Square."

Neither of the pair heeded him. A charred log broke into sudden flame, and tinted the girl's oval face and the curl of dark hair across her forehead.

"I will try to see your father when we stop at the Big Sandy," said Medbridge. "If not, then when we camp tomorrow afternoon. I will pray for him—and for you. God bless you, sister."

His fingers touched her hair in the lightest of benedictions, and he was gone, striding toward the winking fires of the Mormon camp. Song rose as though to welcome him.

*The crown of the martyr's a glorious crown;
And if for the Gospel your lives are laid down,
An escort of angels your spirits will bear
Where Joseph and Hyrum and Abraham are.*

They heard his voice—there was no mistaking it—joining in another verse:

*Like gold in the furnace the Saints must be tried,
Or the coming of Jesus they cannot abide,
Neither dwell in His presence hereafter, nor claim
A fulness of glory with God and the Lamb.*

There followed a moment of silence, then a deep amen. Talbot grunted, belched, and spat. The hot coals hissed.

"I'm beat!" he said. "I was brung up to b'lieve that if'n ye peeled a Mormonite ye'd find horns an' a tail—every time. Them folks down there don't seem like they'd slide a knife under yore ribs if ye turned yore back on 'em—they seem real happy. Y'r pa took to that young feller, too, seems like. . . . He's scarce dry b'hind his ears an' he's an elder. . . . Talks nice, don't he, Miss Ann . . . ?"

Ann said, "Yes, Clem," absently. Thomas Medbridge stood before her mentally, and beside him was the shadowy figure of Jeff Crittenden with his upturned military hat and a red silk handkerchief knotted about his throat. Jeff's eyes were brown and hot and resentful. This Mormon's mouth was gentle beneath his soft mustache, and his blue eyes seemed detached from all earthly things. How old was Jeff? Probably not as old as Thomas Medbridge, but from his years he had taken and held things which the elder must have rejected.

"He's a good man," she said aloud.

"Who?" Talbot raised his head. "Oh—thet young elder. I wonder what in tarnation made a young feller like that take up with the Mormonites?"

Chapter II



HAD ANN CARMENY asked him, Thomas Medbridge would have told her that he was twenty-six years old. He was ten years older than on the day when two Mormon missionaries had trudged into Amity on the Susquehanna River above Harrisburg and been recognized for what they were by the loutish youths of the village. The pair had been pelted with clods and rotten apples and an occasional stone—a diversion in which the boys of Prof. Sillton's Select Academy and Latin School for Young Gentlemen had joined enthusiastically. The effect of the pelting had been unsatisfactory. The missionaries had not run and thereby offered a truly sporting target, neither had they attempted to retaliate in kind. They had turned and faced their tormentors, and the elder of the two had raised his hands and said: "God bless you, boys. You know that the mob stoned our Saviour, Jesus, too, don't you?" It had been quite disconcerting. Even the hoodlums could not enjoy baiting a man who asked God to bless them after an overripe love apple had burst in a crimson explosion on his cheek. Prof. Sillton's Young Gentlemen and Latin Scholars had withdrawn.

At his home that night Thomas had heard more of the missionaries. They had called at many homes, they had distributed tracts, and they had visited Reverend Barnett and asked that they be permitted to stand in his pulpit and tell his congregation of the life and death of their prophet, Joseph Smith, and of the teachings of the Latter Day Saints. Thomas's uncle, Abner Scott, who lived with his widowed sister and managed for her the hay and grain business left by Thomas's father, enlarged on that clash of faiths.

"And when the reverend chose to get huffy about it they asked him if he was afraid of them! Wanted to know if he was scared of what would happen if his folks heard the message of truth—that's what they called it. Long and short of it is that they got what they wanted—there's to be a debate in the church

with one of the missionaries expounding Mormonism, and then the pastor will wave the Disciples' flag and show them where they're wrong. What do you say, Abby? Shall we go and see the fun?"

"I might go," Abigail Medbridge spoke through pursed lips and distinctly emphasized the pronoun, "but not to look for what you call fun. We can never tell—those men might have a message. You've no call to make fun of them."

"Who's making fun? Why, come to think of it, Abby, Joe Smith was by way of being a relation of ours. His wife was a Hale, from Harmony, and mother's cousin Henry Dilworth married into that family."

He slapped his fat thigh and guffawed; his sister had wrinkled her nose for all the world like one of the rabbits in the hutch behind the stable, and young Thomas Medbridge had snatched eagerly at the crumb of information. What precise degree of relationship could he claim? If his grandmother's cousin had married the cousin, or possibly even the sister, of the wife of a prophet, did that mean that he was a sort of a nephew of that prophet? He toyed with the thought of bragging about it to his contemporaries at Prof. Sillton's—now, when everybody was talking about the Mormon missionaries being in Amity and was kind of excited about their impending religious battle with the Reverend Barnett. No. He rejected the idea. He would be laughed at, and he could stand anything better than mockery. He knew the futile rage which came when those who couldn't understand hid their ignorance behind mockery. He had been mocked mercilessly when he selected the famous oration of Toussaint L'Ouverture as his contribution to the monthly meeting of the Ciceronian Oratorical Society. He couldn't just gabble through his lines as the other boys did at those compulsory exercises in declamation. He had thrown into the stately words something of the fire and ambition and despair of the man who had risen from slavery to head a nation, then fallen again to slavery and chains and death in a French prison. He'd been marked one hundred for his delivery by the teacher of forensics—shabby, thoroughly genteel Mr. Sidney Waters, who had studied for the stage and

failed, read for the law and failed, studied for the ministry and been refused ordination when he admitted that he smoked when alone in his room and that he occasionally drank whisky with lemon and sugar and that he could not pledge himself to forego either of those pleasant vices; and who was to die a dozen years later at Gettysburg, major of an infantry battalion and gloriously drunk on liquor stolen from the tent of the brigade commander. Mr. Waters congratulated him before the class; but after dismissal his peers had jeered and had mimicked his accents and his gestures, and Thomas Medbridge had almost wept in the terrible publicity of the playground. They could not understand—he doubted if even Mr. Waters or the omniscient Prof. Sillton could understand—that he could feel words on his tongue and taste them and that they differed in savor one from another as definitely as lemon and licorice and eggs. That was why he liked to read his Latin and Greek aloud and alone . . . *Gens inimica mihi Tyrrhenum navigat æquor* . . . and that other passage where the syllables rang like the clatter of brazen hoofs on pavement . . . *æret corne pedum pulsu simularet equorum*. His lips formed the words; then he went on, aloud:

*White as snow their armor was,
Their steeds were white as snow.
Never on earthly anvil
Did such rare armor gleam,
And never did such gallant steeds
Drink of an earthly stream.*

How could anyone gabble through lines like those? Words were real things. They were splendid and strong, and he loved them. What difference could it make that Toussaint L'Ouverture had been a black man?

He had gone to the meeting with his mother and had listened while the Mormon missionary read from the First Book of Nephi and the Book of Alma and told of the Jaredites and their wars, and of the Nephites and Lamanites and their wars, and of the sealing of the golden plates in the Hill Cumorah after the last great battle and of the angel who led the youthful Joseph

Smith to that hiding place. Those plates had been inscribed with strange characters in a strange tongue, the Reformed Egyptian, and God Himself had put the words of translation in Joseph Smith's mouth. All was words, big words and booming words and long periphrastic sentences which the boy drank like wine. He was less attentive to the clearer exposition of faith and doctrine with which the Reverend Barnett countered. He had heard the Reverend Barnett before. So had his mother, and he knew that she was restless by the way she straightened an already straight bonnet and smoothed the ruffles of her skirt. She seemed reluctant to leave the meeting but did not edge through the crowd which surrounded the missionaries after the services closed with a hymn.

"There's old Mr. Haines," she whispered to Thomas, "and he's asking them to tell him just what their understanding is of original sin, and if they argue back to him he'll keep them till morning. Pshaw! . . . and I'd like to have a word myself with that man who preached. I'd like to ask him about that Book of Mormon. All my life I've heard folks say that it was just a mockery of the Holy Bible, but it seems to me that if God could give the spirit of prophecy to Daniel and Jeremiah that there's no reason He shouldn't give it to a man in our time. I'd like to read that book."

"Somebody said they were boarding down at Mrs. Reall's," he told her. "Maybe we could go there and wait for them—it's not any out of our way."

He had been surprised by the eagerness with which she had clutched the sleeve of his jacket and led him out of the meetinghouse to walk over Green Street and down Sawyer's Lane to the River Road where the pickets of the widow Reall's white-washed fence stood rigidly in moonlit darkness that was as cool as Loyalsock water. They had waited together in the shadow of the maples until they heard footsteps in the gravel and the voices of men.

"It's them," Abby Medbridge had said, and she had stepped out of the shadow to meet them and, boldly, had opened conversation.

"Mister—I heard your name was Dewett, is that right?"

"Yes." Both men had peered at the woman and at the tall boy who stood at her shoulder. "I am Elder Dewett and this is Brother Higgins."

"I was at the meeting, and I heard your sermon. My name's Mrs. Medbridge, and this is my son, Thomas. That book you told about—the Book of Mormon that was translated from the golden plates. I've heard of it since before I was married, and I think now I'd like to read it for myself."

"And you shall read it, sister." There had been unmistakable elation in the man's voice. "You have them in your valise, Brother Higgins"—Thomas Medbridge's fingers had closed on a fat volume bound in smooth calf that was oily to the touch—"and here is something more for you to read, sister. Here is the Book of Doctrines and Covenants which contains the revelations of the Lord as given to Joseph Smith, Junior, the Prophet; and in this little pamphlet by the Apostle Orson Pratt you will find the answer to the question, 'Was Joseph Smith Sent Of God?' Read them, sister, and let this young man read them, too. On Friday night there will be a meeting here—here at Mrs. Reall's house—of a few who wish to inquire further into the truth. Both of you will be welcome."



Thomas Medbridge, before that Friday, had read the Book of Mormon from cover to cover; from "I, Nephi, having been born of goodly parents," to "the pleasing bar of the great Jehovah, the eternal Judge of both quick and dead. Amen." He read the materialistic preachments of Orson Pratt and understood them not at all, but he and his mother slipped away rather guiltily to attend the meeting in Mrs. Reall's front parlor and the other meetings which followed. Brother Higgins went on to Northumberland "to prepare the field for the sowing," but Dewett remained to labor with the few who had professed genuine interest in his teachings. It was at one of those meetings that Thomas Medbridge found his tongue and learned, at sixteen, of the power that was in him.

Among the half-dozen who attended regularly was a seedy farmer from Cowpers and his oversexed but frustrated wife. It was the woman's boast that she had been brought to the foot of the throne of Jesus at the age of nine by Dilkes, the "Leatherwood God." Since then she had sampled Campbellism and Methodism, the cults of sundry Baptist sects, and had been quietly ejected by two horrified ushers from an Episcopal church in Binghamton. She was subject to the jerks. When deeply stirred by religious emotion she twitched—fingers, arms, neck, body, and legs—then threw herself on the floor where she whirled, tossed, and rolled and shouted gibberish. Such seizures were recognized by all evangelists and respected by some. Silas Dewett was not of those last. He was a hard-headed State o' Maine man, as practical as he was devout, and he could not regard drooled gibberish as the "gift of tongues" or tossing limbs as anything but an indecent exposure. He picked Eva Kilber from the floor and laid her roughly on Mrs. Reall's sofa where she continued her spasms as she shrieked what sounded like "*lobida, lobidada, lolobimidaba.*" Esther Hicks and her sister Agatha, spinsters from Amity, drew back aghast—if such were Mormonism they wished none of it!—and Dewett ran hastily to the kitchen for a glass of water to hurl in the disturber's face. Mrs. Kilber sat up and displayed to midthigh a long, skinny leg—and Thomas Medbridge spoke to her in a voice which, though resonant, still retained an echo of boyhood's treble. In the closed room his words throbbed like the notes from a violoncello.

"My sister, in the name of Jesus Christ the Crucified I bid you to be sane!"

The *lobida, lolobimidaba* trailed off into sobs, and the boy deftly twitched the woman's skirts down over her ankles as she buried her face in the sofa cushions. He laid his hands on her head, and again the organ notes of that glorious though untrained voice filled the room.

"Now glory to the Lord of Hosts, from Whom all glories are!"

Prof. Sillton's young gentlemen were required to read Macaulay, but Elder Silas Dewett had never heard of the English

writer of lays. He stood in the doorway and listened to Thomas Medbridge, and the water from the forgotten glass in his hand dripped over his wrist and soaked his trousers at the knee.

"It is the outpouring of the Spirit," he whispered reverently, "and he is only a boy. There is work for him in the Lord's vineyard!"

Conversion was a natural sequel to that phenomenon. Abby Medbridge herself showed Silas Dewett the manner thereof when she fell on her knees beside her son and begged him to bless her. Dewett too knelt, and the act was wholly sincere. He had witnessed and had himself accomplished many conversions, but not since the day of his own had he experienced such spiritual exaltation. He was swept to the heights, but not so high that he failed to observe how dignified was this youth in a moment of triumph. Thomas's hands rested on his mother's head, then passed to Dewett's. "May God bless you, my mother . . . God bless you, brother." That was as it should be, and Dewett proceeded quickly to more practical evangelism. He hustled Mrs. Kilber and her slack-jawed husband from the room—"Git her away from here and keep her away. I don't want to see either one of you again!"—and was back in the parlor before those who remained had missed him. . . . "And now the keys of the Kingdom are in your hands, brothers and sisters. They will open the gates to salvation, to glory through time and eternity. Take them . . . use them. . . ."

3

Abner Scott said little, surprisingly little, when his sister told him that she and Thomas had accepted the faith of the Latter Day Saints and had been baptized in Dover Creek. She was, he declared, old enough to know her own mind, and he hoped that Thomas was too, although of that last he was none too certain. The two of them could go to heaven or the other place by any road they chose to follow so long as they didn't interfere with his own personal religious notions or with the hay, grain, and feed business established by his late brother-in-law and now managed by him. He bottled his hostility until the day when Mor-

monism did interfere with that business, when Abigail Medbridge announced her intention to convert all her property into cash and to "gather with the brethren" in Pittsburgh.

"I reckon that Mormon, Dewett, put that notion into your head, didn't he, Abby? It wasn't so many years ago that we were hearing a lot of stories about Nauvoo and the way old Joe Smith got his simple-minded converts to turn all their cash over to him and the Lord. It looks like they haven't changed much since then—but I don't aim to let you make a fool of yourself."

"You can't stop me!"

"Nope, I can't—but there's someone that can, and that's Jim Medbridge, dead these nine years come February. He left you this house and the farm on the creek road and what cash he had in his personal account in the bank, but he left the business to Tom here on the day that he's twenty-one years old. You can't touch it—and neither can he for five years. Talk to Barringer at the bank."

Abby Medbridge had talked, and angrily, to Barringer. Dewett had planted, among other doctrinal seeds, those of the principle of "gathering" and of eventual migration across the plains to the new Zion on the shores of the Great Salt Lake. Too, he had convinced her that her son would become a proselyter greater than any the church had known. He would travel to far lands, carrying the message of the gospel of these latter days, but he would travel without purse or script, and something in the nature of a cash endowment would be more than useful to a young zealot. Clyde Barringer was a Hard-shell Baptist, who would cross a muddy street rather than permit his shadow to fall on that of a Mormon or a Roman Catholic. He told Abby Medbridge that he thought she had lost her wits, that he was executor of her husband's will, and that if she attempted to break it he would do all in his power to have her declared mentally incompetent and that maybe he should take that step anyhow for Thomas's sake. The idea of a boy of sixteen taking up with such outlandish religions as Mormonism—she ought to be ashamed of herself, and she should know that James Medbridge would turn in his grave if he knew what she was doing

and what she purposed to do. Maybe it was his, Clyde Barringer's, duty to have those meddling Mormons run out of the town and the county, and he wouldn't wonder if a coat of tar and feathers would teach them and their kind to keep out of decent communities and . . .

He made his attitude very plain, so plain that Silas Dewett assembled his six converts rather hastily and moved them down-river to Northumberland. Six was an excellent yield for a village the size of Amity—more than excellent when one was a young man so promising as Thomas Medbridge. From Northumberland they went to Pittsburgh where two, Samuel Davis and his wife, weakened in the faith and apostasized. The Hicks sisters and Abigail Medbridge worked zealously in the ward chapel there, and if Abby missed her son she comforted herself with thoughts of his swift rise in the priesthood and the work he was accomplishing in the European missions.

England and France and Spain and Switzerland and Germany and the Scandinavian countries. Thomas Medbridge had seen them all in those ten years. Deacon and priest and elder before he was twenty-one . . . long hours of instruction in Mormon doctrine and the method of its expounding . . . instruction in other doctrines, too, and the combating of arguments advanced by Baptist or Wesleyan or Presbyterian . . . work and study far more intense and exacting than anything of which he had ever dreamed while a scholar at Prof. Sillton's Academy. He learned that there was far more to evangelism than a willingness to testify, more to prayer than an outpouring of the Spirit. There was pleasure in the work, however. Prayer was skillfully combined with food and with dancing and with hymns that thundered like battledrums; and there was pleasure to be found in one's steadily increasing assurance and in dawning maturity and power and in the respect with which older and more experienced men held him.

He had returned to Amity only once: to accept his heritage of the hay and grain business and to sell that business, on the day of its acquisition, to his uncle. Two thousand dollars in cash; the balance of eighteen thousand dollars to be paid at the rate of

twenty-five dollars weekly with the unpaid balance accumulating interest at six per cent. It was wealth beyond appraisal in the eyes of his fellows of the English mission, to which he returned as swiftly as train and ship could transport him.

He saw Europe through missionary eyes—his own and those of his fellows in the priesthood. They surveyed the nations as farmers survey their fields and determine questions of fertility and sterility. Here in the river bottoms corn and wheat will be planted; these uplands will furnish good pasture; yonder rocky hillsides may be left to the sumach and briers. They see nothing of maples bursting into flame at the first touch of frost, of gentle slopes touched with the green of young wheat and swelling like women's breasts with knowledge of their own fecundity, of the blue shadows of pines on snow. Medbridge and his associates were as blind to beauty. He entered no art galleries or libraries, he saw great churches and cathedrals only as he passed, and his one adventure in sightseeing was a visit to the Tower of London where he inspected the crown jewels and the exhibit of medieval instruments of torture and made notes for a sermon in which those things were paraded to the discredit of the Church of England.

France and Spain, he reported to the Apostle John Taylor, could be regarded as hopeless from the Mormon viewpoint. Their people were steeped in the superstitious idolatry of Catholicism, nor could missionaries be expected to gain any command of the languages without many months of study. Germany was a land of stolid burghers who drank beer and smoked pipes and were regular in their attendance at Lutheran church or Roman mass. They were friendly people and kindly but unresponsive to the message of the everlasting gospel. Elder Karn had applied to the Berlin authorities for permission to preach in that city and had received a bluntly worded command to leave the capital and the country within twenty-four hours. It were better to concentrate evangelistic efforts in Scandinavia, where marked progress had been made, and in England.

Thomas Medbridge came to regard himself as a fixture of the English mission. He learned the trade of printer, to set type and

read proof, and later to edit and rephrase the sermons which were printed in the *Millennial Star* or published as tracts from the Liverpool offices on Islington Street. Once he had asked permission to migrate to Utah with the next group of converts; that was when he received a letter from his mother telling him that she was on her way to Iowa City and would leave from there on the long journey across the plains. That permission was not given. He was doing the Lord's work, and it was the will of God and of his superiors that he continue his labors in England. Thomas obeyed counsel. Then, more than a year later, Elder Collingwood laid a letter before him.

. . . The brethren arriving from England have brought good word of Elder Thomas Medbridge and of his faith and labors. There is work for this young man to do for the Lord in Zion . . . and he seems well fitted to serve as President of the party during the crossing of the Atlantic. Elder Scholl will meet them in Brooklyn and Elder Dempsey will receive the party in Iowa City. . . .

Your brother in Christ,

BRIGHAM YOUNG.

4

When he met Ann Carmeny at the crossing of the Little Sandy, Thomas Medbridge had been in America, and in contact with the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints in America, for some four months. His faith in Joseph Smith had not wavered, but he was disconcerted more than he would admit even to himself by revelations of church policy and the attitude of his ecclesiastical superiors. In the foreign missions he and his companions had preached the gospel—he told himself—in its ancient purity and in its promise of salvation to those who believed. In his native land he encountered a gospel of hate. The converts from abroad were quartered in Mormon homes in New York and Brooklyn until arrangements could be completed for their transportation to St. Joseph and Iowa City. They listened to many sermons from Elder Scholl, from Elder Tewks-

bury in Brooklyn, and from Elder Dempsey after their arrival in the West. To the converts, starry-eyed at the thought that they were at last on American soil, those men preached hatreds. Hatreds of the mobs which had expelled the Saints from New York, Ohio, Missouri, and Illinois and forced them to find a haven beyond the Rocky Mountains; the mobs which had slaughtered Joseph Smith and his brother Hyrum, the Patriarch; the mobs which through all the history of the Saints had harried and persecuted them. In the course of one sermon Scholl screamed, "I'll show you! I'll show you the best that the Saints can expect at the hands of the Gentiles!" and cast aside his coat, vest, and shirt, then squirmed his arms out of the long sleeves of his one-piece suit of underwear—the sacred "garment" designed and prescribed by Joseph Smith and worn by every Mormon. He was a grotesque figure, stripped to the waist and with the sleeves of the garment dangling about his heels, until he turned his back. The flesh, from shoulders to waist, was seamed and ridged with scars that crossed and crisscrossed one another in a horrid pattern.

"They whipped me," he shouted. "They burned my house, and they left my family standing homeless and shivering in a winter night; and they stripped me and tied me to a tree and lashed me with a whip. They threw our Prophet in jail, and when he and his apostles were starving they offered them meat cut from the bones of their dead friends. 'Mormon beef,' they call it. . . . May God curse them all. May He blast and damn every Gentile from the President in the White House to the last lying, thieving, Missouri mobocrat. . . ."

"I believe in feeding 'em strong meat," he said to Thomas afterward. "If it turns their stummicks at first, so much the better; it'll teach 'em to hold it. Wait until you hear Brother Brigham and Brother Heber in the Great Salt Lake City tabernacle."

"I have read their sermons," said Medbridge simply. He did not add that he found them, as published in Liverpool, vulgar and distressing. For himself he found in Mormonism a spiritual exaltation. It taught him love, and he could not acquire the vicious hatred expressed by Scholl and Dempsey. In the presence

of Gentiles the elders were unctuously polite; they were Pharisees who unostentatiously avoided the pollution of Gentile touch. He knew that they had been kindly and sympathetic during their visit to the Carmeny wagon; but they returned from that call to lead evening prayer, and Dempsey called upon the newly made Saints to steel their arms for the day of vengeance which would surely come. Thomas told himself, for the hundredth time, that those men were only two among many and that they were embittered by their personal experiences in Missouri and at Nauvoo; in Zion all would be different. He thus comforted himself, but he was the more gentle with the converts when they wearied toward the close of the long day's march and the more solicitous in his calls at the Carmeny wagon.

"She is a Gentile, Brother Medbridge," Dempsey snapped. Thomas faced him gravely.

"Yes. She is also alone with a very sick man, and she is worried. I prayed over him tonight and anointed him."

Dempsey did not accept the implied challenge. Thomas turned his back on the older man, knelt beside the wheel of the wagon, and prayed before crawling into the bed that was spread on the bare ground. That night he had prayed long and earnestly over Peter Carmeny. He had anointed him with consecrated oil, had blessed him in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, and had placed his hands on Ann's bowed head.

"Comfort yourself, sister," he had said. "Your father will live to see Zion. God has spoken to me, and it is His will."

It amounted to a prophecy, and he knew that Brigham Young was not given to prophecy or revelation and that he did not encourage those things among his subordinates. So to prophesy, and to a Gentile, amounted to disobedience, but his thoughts as he lay in his blankets were of Ann's bowed head and of the sweep of white flesh where neck met shoulder and of the soft smoothness of her hair under his palms.

Chapter III

I

CLEM TALBOT had the oxen fed and standing in their yokes when the Mormon train pulled out in the morning. The California emigrants followed, and he dropped into their line in the place indicated by the captain, Phineas Johnson. A thin-faced woman in the next wagon waved vigorously to Ann.

"I'm Mis' Miller," she shouted. "Sophronia Miller. We're from Kaskaskia, an' I'll be over t' see you soon's we stop."

Clem's long whip popped, and the oxen took up their plodding, enduring stride. The spare team and Ann's black saddle mare, Lil, had already been turned in with the emigrants' small herd of loose stock.

"Y'know, Miss Ann," Talbot remarked, "I been tryin' t' figger out why we laid over here waitin' f'r these people. They say th' stage road t' Fort Bridger an' on t' Great Salt Lake is as plain as a turnpike. We could've gone on easy's not."

"I wanted father to get a few days' rest, Clem. Besides, there are too many stories of things that have happened to wagons traveling alone. The Indians won't bother a train, but they'd be pretty quick to run off the stock from just a single wagon."

"I've heard of them Injuns. Scrub some of 'em, folks say, an' you'd find a white hide. Brigham Young's Danites. Some call 'em 'Destroyin' Angels,' but they're the gang of Mormons that obey orders without askin' questions and do the murderin' when Brigham wants to get rid of somebody that's makin' trouble. A feller named Porter Rockwell is the chief killer, I've heard."

"Yes. I've heard that, too. You hear so much about the Mormons that you don't know what to believe."

"Plenty of it's lies, I reckon." Clem lit his pipe, puffed, and expanded generously. "That young feller Medbridge that was down here last night—I can't figger him turnin' no crooked tricks. Jes' th' same, when I know there's snakes around I cut me a club."

They encountered no Indians, white or red, except a few filthy Utahs at Fort Bridger, nearly a hundred miles beyond the Little Sandy. Those hurried from one wagon to another, palms extended, begging for "shugie" and "baccy." The fort built to replace the old post burned by the Mormons in '57 had been abandoned, its garrison withdrawn to the southern battlefields, and the Indians were insolent. Talbot glared at the first beggar, threatened the second with an ax, and kicked the third head over heels into a pile of ox-dung. Ann was not annoyed thereafter.

Peter Carmeny's condition was definitely improved. His appetite was good, he sat up each day for a longer period, and the intensity of the fever seemed to decrease in direct proportion to the distance gained to the westward. He was still weak—there was a perceptible tremor in his fingers, and his voice had lost much of its argumentative bark—but he seemed to be gaining each day. Ann credited much of that steady improvement to the attention given him by the young elder. Medbridge actually did very little, but his presence alone seemed to stimulate the sick man. The elder visited the Carmeny wagon each evening, sometimes only for a few minutes, sometimes remaining until the fires had died and all others in the camp had retired. He and Ann talked with increasing confidence one in the other, but ever between them was the high barrier of religion, a barrier which seemed to lie at the end of every avenue and bypath of conversation.

"I am not trying to convert you," he protested. "I just want you to try to understand. Is it consistent for you to believe in the prophets of the Old Testament and yet to refuse to believe that God gave vision similar to theirs to Joseph Smith?"

She shook her head.

"Our home was at Painesville on Lake Erie," she said, "and Kirtland, where Joseph Smith lived for a while, was only a few miles away. Father remembers well when the Mormons were there. People laughed at them most of the time and thought they were harmless fanatics whose leader was either a fraud or

a fool. I don't want to hurt you, elder, but I've heard him called both those names many times by people who had seen him and talked with him."

"That was his fate—always to be misunderstood." Medbridge's voice was low. "He was too great a man, and his vision was too—too supernal for him to be understood by the little minds around him. He was a man, and yet when he did things which other men did people cried, 'How can this fellow be a prophet of God? I saw him laughing and wrestling with some other men. I saw him in the tavern taking a drink after work was done. A prophet does not do things like that!' They threw him in jail in Missouri and told him that if he was truly a prophet of God to call up a legion of angels and order them to throw down the bars. And in the end they killed him. In New York, in Ohio, in Missouri, and in Illinois he knew only misunderstanding and persecution, and they followed him to the grave."

"I can't argue with you, elder, and I don't want to. I've told people that I don't believe all those horrible stories about the Mormons that we've heard ever since we left St. Joseph. But some of the things are true, and they're a part of your religion. To me they're worse than all the stories of Danites and of white Indians."

"You can mean only one thing," he said slowly, "and that is our doctrine of a plurality of wives—what you call polygamy."

"I don't care what name it's called by—it's wrong!"

He shook his head.

"You are not a believer; if you were it would be different. You would understand then that these are the days of the last dispensation and that the teaching of Joseph Smith is indeed the everlasting gospel. You would understand that God's revelation to Joseph Smith was restating the authority which He had granted to Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and to Moses and David and Solomon."

His tongue was earnest, but in the firelight his eyes were troubled.

"If polygamy—I'm sorry, but that's the only thing I can call it—is so wonderful and if it's approved by God, why haven't you adopted it?"

"I? I haven't taken even one wife!" He tried to smile. "I guess I've been working too hard. This trip from England and across the Plains has been the first time since I became a Latter Day Saint that I haven't been busy with missionary labors. When the time comes for me to take a wife, God will speak and tell me."

"Or two wives," Ann added. "Or three, or even a couple of dozen like Brigham Young has. Will God tell you to do that, too?"

"Yes, He will—in the fullness of His time. If you were a Saint, Ann Carmeny, you would understand that, too."

"Didn't you tell me," she persisted, "that you were looking forward to reaching Great Salt Lake City because your mother was there and you hadn't seen her in years?" He nodded and she went on mercilessly. "Would you still feel that polygamy was right and that God approved of it if you found out that she had married again and was the eighth or ninth wife of some Mormon?"

Medbridge turned angrily toward her, then suddenly relaxed and chuckled.

"I'll never be able to answer that—and if you knew my mother you wouldn't have asked it. Mother is very strong in the faith—we were converted and baptized together—but she's nearly sixty years old now. She wouldn't remarry."

"I think you mean that you hope that she wouldn't," said the girl. "And what's more, I think that way down in your heart you hate the idea of polygamy just as much as any Gentile does. You know that only savages have more than one wife and that the Mormons are the only people in the whole world who call themselves Christians and at the same time approve of such a thing. It's just as wrong as anything can possibly be, and you know it!"

He did not answer her. She watched his face, all ruddy in the

firelight, and did not observe the flexing of his slender fingers.

"You are tired, sister." He rose quickly. "I have stayed too long. The last thing I want to do is to quarrel with you. God bless you."

As always, he touched her head lightly in benediction.

• 2

Fort Bridger was behind them, and the Weber River, and the scarlet and buff cliffs of the Echo Cañon. They were in the heart of the Wasatch Mountains now, and for the first time in all the westward journey the road looped and turned upon itself to find a course between the high peaks to the final gorge which pierced the range and led out into the valley of the Great Salt Lake. The doubled teams labored, and the wagons lurched like anchored sloops in a tideway over the steep ascents; then pitched down the opposing descents with the locked wheels skidding and screeching over the naked rock. Peter Carmeny suffered, but less than Ann had feared, although his fever rose again at night and his sleep was once more restless. She gave him none of the purges and other febrifuges recommended by the women of the emigrant train—"If only y' could get hold of some boneset, Miss Ann, an' put just th' teeniest mite of flaxseed with it"—feeling with the Mormons that Zion lay just beyond the horizon and that in Great Salt Lake City her father would find both medical attention and rest that would be undisturbed by the daily making and breaking of camp. The Mormons were jubilant. Forty acres for every man, the elders assured the converts from the Midlands, forty acres and a cow, possibly an additional wife for those stalwart in the faith and obedient to counsel; the opportunity to complete their conversion with the endowment ceremonies, the sealing of husbands and wives for time and for eternity—small wonder that they sang through the hours of the day as well as about the campfires at night.

*We seek a land where truth will reign,
And innocence be free;
Where lawful rights will be maintained—
A land of liberty!*

Then all shouted:

*Thou Camp of Israel, onward move;
Oh Jacob, rise and sing;
Ye Saints, the world's salvation prove—
All hail to Zion's King!*

They sang that "Brigham Young was the Lion of the Lord" and another song which Ann loved to hear. The air moved slowly and tenderly through the verse:

*Our Father God, to Thee belongs
The tribute of our sweetest songs:
Thy power and mercy crown our way
To all the blessings of this day.*

*Thou God that formed the heavens and earth,
Who brought the seas and fountains forth,
To Thee the Saints of Latter Day
Their grateful, constant service pay.*

But the chorus which followed rang like the clashing of arms and was—like so many of the songs they sang—resentful and hostile both:

*Shout! Shout! all ye Saints, till the valleys of Ephraim
Resound with the praise of our Father on high;
Who has given us a home in the midst of the mountains,
While the judgments and scourges of God shall pass by.*

Ann tried on occasion to talk with the women of the Mormon train. She was actuated principally by sympathy for them—nothing could be more apparent than their poverty and their lack of fitness for life in a new, primitive country—but she confessed to herself an insincere hope that some one of them would give her a woman's opinion of the Mormon institution of a plurality of wives. There was no evidence of polygamy among the members of the train; but the doctrine had been publicly announced ten years before, and the whole world knew—and resented!—that polygamy was actively prac-

ticed in all the Utah settlements. The missionaries in the eastern states and in the foreign field had been compelled to admit and to defend the doctrine, although they avoided the subject whenever possible.

All of Ann's approaches failed. Some of the women stared at her, stupidly or shyly, and others answered in English provincial dialects which she could understand little more readily than the harsh gutturals of the Danes and Swedes. When conversation was achieved it was brief. A man, sometimes one of the elders, more often a subordinate leader, would call to the woman and give instructions or orders which invariably removed her from Gentile contact. One of those interruptions sent Ann back to her own wagon shaking with laughter.

"Sister 'Arriet, Sister 'Arriet," a man shouted. "Brother 'Arris is awsking for a bysin of hoats for the 'orses and 'e says please to 'urry!"

Sister Harriet Harris was married, but more than half of the converts were single women; many of them girls still in their teens. All had been assured husbands in Zion, but if they gave thought to the question of polygamy none of those thoughts passed their lips. Some of them, Ann knew, had walked the entire distance from Iowa City—outfitting point of the emigration to Deseret—to the Salt Lake valley. There was room on the baggage wagons for their scanty luggage, a place in the tents for them to sleep, but throughout the day they trudged uncomplainingly through the deep dust.

One of them—and one of the few women who was willing to talk to a Gentile—had been a parlormaid in the household of an English earl . . . "and in all my life I never walked farther than to the village, perhaps, or to the church. On Sundays there was always a carriage for the house servants . . . but I visited my sister in Liverpool when she was put to bed after the birth of her third child, and I was converted there."

"And you've never regretted it?" Ann asked incautiously.

"Of course not—nor would you, ma'am, if your eyes were only opened as mine were. Have you a Bible in your wagon?" She took the volume which Ann brought and turned to the

Book of Daniel. "This is the verse on which the elder preached on the day that the scales fell from my eyes and I knew that my soul had found salvation. The twenty-seventh verse of the seventh chapter. Listen to it, ma'am: 'And the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom, under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people of the saints of the most High, whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey Him.' If you'd think on that verse, ma'am, you'd know what I know."

Ann mentioned the incident to Thomas Medbridge.

"That was Sister Grace Easton," he said. "She is a young woman of great promise in the faith. What do you think of that verse she read to you?"

"I did read it again, but if you want to know the truth I found it rather confusing."

"And yet it is as clear as that mountain yonder against the blue sky. You don't believe that God spoke to Joseph Smith, but there are God's words to a prophet of an older day; a promise that in these latter days is finding its fulfillment. The Saints of God will inherit the kingdoms of earth as well as the Kingdom of Heaven. You will live to see the first even if your pride will not let you be a part of it."

"I hope—" She checked the speech quickly.

"What is it you hope?"

"I'm sorry I even started to say it. I was thinking that I hoped nothing ever happened to weaken your faith."

"Nothing could do that. Nothing."

3

The road emerged from the mountains as suddenly and surprisingly as a train from a tunnel. At one moment yellowish-brown hills, covered with scrub oak and with crimson patches of fireweed, rose high on either hand; at the next the hills retreated to left and right, and the course lay across a gently rolling benchland high above a mighty valley. Many miles to the westward the placid, shallow waters of the Great Salt Lake lay like a mirror in the bright sunlight; more immediately at hand were

green trees and the blue haze of smoke rising from many chimneys. To the emigrants it was a pleasant halting place on the long journey to California; to Ann the sight of a civilized community meant medical attention and skilled care for her father; to the Mormon converts it was the City Beautiful, the end of their journey and the goal of their dreams.

In the approach to the city the Gentile emigrants were made sharply aware that they were but trail-weary travelers; those of the Mormon train were taking rightful places among the elect of the earth. There was a band to welcome the converts as their wagons reached the first of the terraced descents to the city; there were men and boys on horseback and folk in carriages to bring greetings and shout "Hosannah to God and the Lamb," and there were two men, each in his own carriage and driven by a coachman, who—the story flew swiftly from one wagon to another—were Apostles and members of the Quorum of the Twelve.

Other horsemen met the leaders of the California emigrants and switched the train deftly to other roads which led to the assigned camp ground near the southern limits of the city. They had known many far less agreeable campsites. It was clean—Mormon police were on hand to rebuke all those who failed to burn or bury their refuse—there was abundant fresh water in a broad ditch, and wood and fodder were for sale at quite moderate prices. The cattle and horses, one of the guides informed them, could be taken to the public grazing grounds and foraged there for a very small fee. That night Peter Carmeny sat in a chair beside his wagon and listened with interest and amusement to the reports of his own men, Talbot and Larsen, and to other men of the train who had visited the city that was more talked about than any other on the western hemisphere.

"From what Ann tells me," he remarked, "there was no truth in the stories we heard about the high prices here. We're paying less for grain and grazing than we did at St. Joe."

"Likker's jest th' same," Talbot volunteered. "Four bits a dram for what they make out here. 'Valley Tan,' they call it, an'

I'm tellin' yuh it's got a kick like my grandpappy's old shotgun!"

"There's wimmin!" Elijah Miller dropped his voice and made sure that neither his wife nor Ann was within earshot. "Lissen—I was standin' on th' sidewalk t'other side of th' stage-station, an' as swell a lookin' woman as ever I see come out of a store and give me a how-do-ye-do. Called me 'brother,' she did and wanted to know if I was one of the brothers that just got in. I laffed and said I was with the other bunch, an' quick as scat she asked if I had any tea 'r coffee along. 'Plenty,' I says, 'enough t' take us through t' Californy an' last us a while after we git there,' an' th' words weren't more'n out of my mouth b'fore she asked me didn't I want to stick a pound 'r so in my pocket an' come out to see her. 'Th' third street west an' th' fourth south,' she says, 'a 'dobe house with a white fence an' blue winder-shutters. My husband's an elder,' she says, 'and he holds t' the Word of Wisdom, an' he won't stand f'r tea 'r coffee bein' in th' house. I'd do anything f'r some coffee,' she says."

"Anything?" Clem Talbot licked his lips. "An' then what?"

"I ain't no fool. 'Ma'am,' I says, 'you've said two things that you got to enlarge on. Th' first is that you've got a husband, an' I'm askin' where is he at; th' second is that you'd do anything f'r some coffee 'r tea. What's anything?' I says. 'It's anything,' she says, never battin' an eye, 'an' as f'r my husband he's on a mission to th' Sandwich Islands, and he left me here. I'm lonely,' she says. That talk's plain enough f'r a deaf, dumb, an' blind man. Whut d'ye say, Clem? I'll tell my old woman that we're goin' t' walk uptown an' mebbe have some beer t' git th' dust outa our throats, an' we'll walk over there an' look th' place over. I'll carry th' tea an' tell her I got a friend outside waitin' t' deliver th' coffee!" He bellowed at the picture his words suggested.

"I didn't see nothin' like that," the stolid Larsen commented, "but I did see, more'n once, a man walkin' along with two or three or four wimmin comin' after him. I got t' talkin' with a

feller on th' corner that said he'd come here five years ago with th' army and got his discharge here. Th' Mormons didn't mind his stayin' because he was a number one gunsmith and they was forever bustin' their guns and men was scarce that could forge springs and make parts. This feller said never t' notice things like one man with a bunch of wimmin or t' let on that things here was any different from what y'd find anywhere else. The Mormons didn't like it, he said, and if they didn't like a feller or what he said he didn't last long—they sicked the Danites on him, and that was the last of him."

"That I don't believe," Peter Carmeny said from the blankets which wrapped him. "I've heard those Danite stories for twenty years—ever since the Mormons got chased out of Missouri and settled in Nauvoo—and I don't believe any of them. A lie's like a skunk—you don't have to see it to know it's there."

"There's some that'd argue with you on that," remarked a man named Dager. "Do any of you remember a fellow that kept a saddle shop in St. Joe just opposite the Overland station?" Several of the men nodded. "Well, he was in Great Salt Lake City for three years—he came back east after the army got here in '58. He told me that the year before that there was three fellows came through from California with a bunch of gold and the Mormons made some kind of excuse for arresting them. Finally told 'em they couldn't go on east because of the army that was coming to fight the Mormons—that was what they all believed—but that they could go back to California over the Spanish Trail. They set out—I forget whether he said there was three or four of them—and the Danites followed them and came up on their camp and killed some of them. Tried to blame it on the Indians. One fellow got away and got clear back to Great Salt Lake City. He knew too much—such as the real color of the Indians that had killed his partners—and they shot him just outside of the city here and left him in the ditch. Everybody knew about it, the saddle maker said, and knew it was Danite work, but they were almighty careful who they let hear them talking."

Clem Talbot leaned over the fire and deftly juggled a live coal into the bowl of his pipe.

"I wish," he said plaintively, "thet there was some way a feller c'd find out th' real truth 'bout these people—these Mormons. In Missouri, where I was raised, they was every last one of 'em sons o' bitches. I c'n remember what they called the Mormon War, back about '38. There was shootin' an' burnin' an' general hell all round—with both sides doin' their share of it. 'Cordin' to some folks Mormons was th' same 's wolves 'r any other varmints an' was t' be hunted out as sech. Now I git out here, an' I find that plenty of 'em are respectable godly people sech as y' might meet comin' outa church on a Sunday at home. Take that young Elder Medbridge we traveled with—there weren't nothin' of th' throat-cuttin' Danite 'bout him."

"None of them are throat-cutters," Peter Carmeny snapped. "The Mormons are a misled and misguided people who believe in a religion that was founded by a faker who was hornier than that stallion that Dager has had so much trouble with. All they want is to be let alone, and I, for one, say let 'em alone. Things like polygamy, even, are bound to run themselves out if you give them time."

He coughed suggestively as the sound of women's voices came from behind the Miller wagon. Ann Carmeny stood there talking with Sophronia Miller oblivious to the children who raced and tore around them in the day's final outburst of energy. Elijah Miller rose and nudged Talbot with his foot.

"Whut d'yuh say, Clem? 'Taint far an' 'twont do no harm jest t' take a look round. I'll sneak in th' wagon an' grab some tea an' coffee."

Talbot grinned, spat, and nodded. The two edged out of the circle of firelight as Ann crossed from the Miller wagon.

"I think you've been sitting up plenty long enough, papa," she said. "It's high time you were in bed."

Larsen helped his employer climb the ladder which slanted from the lowered tail gate to the ground. All had become skilled in the routine of aiding Carmeny to undress, of making

up his bed on one side of the wagon and of drawing the curtain which separated his cot from that which his daughter occupied. Ann could raise that curtain and touch her father without leaving her own bed, but the light fabric contributed a degree of privacy.

"How do you feel, papa?"

"Right pert, daughter. It doesn't seem like I've had a bit of fever tonight, and it's comforting to know that we'll be sitting still all day tomorrow and for a couple of days to come. When are these folks moving on, Ann?"

"I haven't heard anybody say. Not for four or five days or a week, anyhow. Mr. Dager was making the rounds this afternoon figuring up the repairs that had to be made on the wagons."

"The way I feel now there's no reason we can't go on with them."

"We'll see what the doctor says to that, papa. I'm sorry I couldn't get him today, but his wife said he'd be back late tonight and she'd send him out to the camp first thing in the morning."

"He'll have no pills that'll help me—the only medicine I need is a couple of days' rest, and I'll be as good as I ever was."

"We'll see what he says," she repeated. "Lie down now, papa, and go to sleep. I'm going to come in a minute."

She stood for a time at the end of the wagon, listening with little real attention to the camp noises and remarking mentally on the sight of so many scattered lights to tell that they were at last in an inhabited region. She knew that twenty years before no white men save wandering trappers had even seen this valley; only fifteen years had passed since the Mormons had entered and cleared the sagebrush and brought water from the creeks to their fields. Now there was a busy and prosperous city, and the lights of widely scattered homes winked bravely out of the darkness to the south and east toward the great mass of the Wasatch range. Her father turned on his cot and grunted sleepily. She waited until he was quiet, then entered the wagon and undressed.

She did not know at what time she woke. Dawn was still far away, for there was none of the clatter of cooking pans and the other sounds of campers accustomed to eating their morning meal before sunrise. She stretched luxuriously. Today there'd be no hurry and bustle, no shouts of "hitch up and roll!" They'd rest; and, if the doctor advised that Peter Carmeny stay in Great Salt Lake City for the winter, they'd rent a house and buy furniture and live like Christians, with a place to sleep that wasn't like stretching out on a pantry shelf. It wasn't as though they were destitute, like so many of the California emigrants. They had money, plenty of it. Larsen and Talbot could go on to California with the train if they wanted to.

She listened a moment for the sound of her father's breathing, then raised the curtain between the beds and touched him lightly. He was still, too still, and she swung her legs from under the blankets and leaned over him.

"Clem!" she screamed. "Clem, hurry. Bring a lantern!"

Chapter IV

I

SHE KNEW THAT Peter Carmeny was dead; knew it even before Clem Talbot responded to her call and clambered into the wagon. John Larsen was at his heels. Both were barefoot, and their galluses were dangling from hastily donned trousers. The candle-lantern smoked, and the smell of hot wax was unpleasant. Talbot, the lantern in his hand, bent over the cot.

"There's nothin' t' be done, Miss Ann. I reckon ye'll want t' git dressed. Jawn, go call Mis' Miller."

Sophronia appeared and took charge with the garrulous efficiency of one to whom death was an unwelcome guest rather than a stranger.

"Passed away in his sleep, th' dear man," she said, "an' that's a mercy although it's hard on you, dearie, so far away from your kin an' all."

She seemed to know instinctively where things were kept

and without inquiring of the stricken Ann found a white handkerchief with which to cover Carmeny's face and another with which she bound his jaws.

"Clem, you git over an' tell 'Lige what's happened an' tell him t' git th' children dressed an' take 'em over t' Harper's wagon an' ask Mis' Harper t' see that they git their breakfast an' git kept over there. Then git some clothes on, both of ye, so's one of ye c'n set with him."

Those things Ann remembered, but the remainder of that day was the recollection of a disordered dream. The doctor arrived, made brief examination of the dead man, and said that he would sign a certificate that death had been due to heart failure and would send an undertaker . . . "a Gentile, ma'am, and I give you my word that you can leave everything to him." That was part of the nightmare, as were the horse-faced undertaker and his wagon with the long body, so grimly useful, extending over the rear axle . . . "I can give you pine, ma'am, but the best are of oak which is hard to come by here—oak with a copper lining covered with two layers of linen duck and one of satin, and there's nothing finer to be had between St. Joseph and San Francisco."

That was a dream, and the selection and preparation of the clothes she must wear were dreams, and she could not recall with any clarity the details of the long hours in the stuffy confines of the Miller wagon and the names of the women who came to see her and who sobbed so gustily. Ann did not weep. She did not even wish for tears. She watched Mrs. Miller's fingers stitching black crepe, and she wondered why her muscles ached as though she were all one bruise from shoulders to knees.

Somehow and from somewhere a minister appeared. Ann never learned, then or afterward, who had notified him of Peter Carmeny's death or had sent him to her. He was a tall man, as lean as a wagon spoke, with long hands and bony wrists protruding from the fraying cuffs of a loose black coat. He was a Methodist, he said, struggling to plant a little garden of God's

grace in a sinful land peopled by the misguided and the self-deceived, and if she had made no other arrangements he would be glad to serve her to the best of his ability in this sad hour. He stood at the tail gate of the Miller wagon and talked to her, and she interjected toneless affirmatives and negatives in his pauses. No, her father had not been a member of the Methodist Church; yes, they were Protestants and, she hoped, Christians; yes, he could confer with the undertaker and learn the hour and place of interment—*why did the man have to come to her with such things?* He looked like a buzzard as he stood there with his hat in his hand and his wrinkled pink scalp above the collar of his black coat. A buzzard knew when death occurred and didn't have to be told—no, she did not particularly want him to pray with her or for her. Not now, and she would have to ask him to excuse her.

Thomas Medbridge came and stood in precisely the same spot. He had put aside the rough clothes of the trail in which she had always seen him and was dressed in black broadcloth with a string tie at the throat of a white linen shirt. *How handsome he is! Is it wrong of me to think of that at such a time? I never realized it before. If he shaved off that soft fuzzy beard of his and was dressed in black tights, he'd look like Mr. Booth in Hamlet. His voice, too—did anybody ever tell you that you should be on the stage, elder, instead of converting grubby-handed Englishwomen to Mormonism?*

"I was in the office of the *Deteret News*, Miss Ann, and it was just by chance that I happened to see a notice that your father had passed away. I came to you as soon as I could."

"Thank you, elder."

"I am ordained, Miss Ann. I am a minister of the gospel, and if you want me I will feel honored to read the funeral services of your own church over your father."

"No, but thank you very much, elder." She did not want to hurt him, and the thoughtfulness made her own misery suddenly less numbing. "Father liked you, and I'm sure he respected your sincerity even if he didn't agree with your beliefs—*how*

can a young fellow like that, with a head on his shoulders, really believe in that worthless Joe Smith?—and I don't think he'd want to have a Mormon minister conduct the services."

"It's whatever you wish." He bowed, and the sunlight was bright on his brown hair. "Shall we pray?"

"Please do."

His words did not remain with her, but she bowed her head and listened to the deep organ music of his voice. . . . "And they that mourn shall be comforted and those we call dead are living in the glory everlasting and may the God of the widowed and the fatherless look down upon you and bless you and lighten your burden . . . Our Father, who art in Heaven, hallowed . . . Amen."

"Thank you, elder."

"It is such a little thing to do for you when I want to do so much. I will see you again, Miss Ann, and if you should need me. . . ."

Then he was gone, and Sophronia Miller was commenting on his appearance and his manners and the words of his prayer "which certainly wasn't what you'd expect from no Mormon"; and then, later, it was dark, and she was returning to the wagon in which Peter Carmeny had died—her wagon now. Only her cot stood there now. She unlaced her shoes, lay down fully dressed, and was asleep almost instantly. She woke some hours later, rested and surprised that she had slept. Sleep seemed somehow disloyal to her father. She slipped her feet into her slippers and got a drink from the keg lashed to the side of the wagon. While she stood there Clem Talbot crawled from between the wheels. He took the cup she set down and drank deeply.

"Grievin's dryin', Miss Ann. He was a good man t' work for."

"Thank you, Clem."

He said nothing more by way of sympathy. She noticed that he had not even removed his boots. Clem was a good man, too, faithful. . . . She lifted her eyes to the austere peaks and the steel-blue stars. Talbot cleared his throat.

"John Larsen—he's worried, Miss Ann."

"About what?"

"'Bout whut yo're gonna do. Are y' goin' on t' Californy with these folks 'r back to th' States an yore kin there? He's plumb set on goin' t' Californy."

"And you, Clem?"

"I ain't give it any thought. Yore pa hired me, an' I figger thet now I'm workin' f'r you. If'n y' aim t' go back to th' States, an' want me t' take ye there, I'll do it. There'll be more trains t' Californy next year if'n I'm still of a mind t' go. Seems like th' closer y' git t' Californy th' less of a place it is."

"Clem, you're a good man!" She choked suddenly and laid her hand on his arm.

"I aims t' be square, Miss Ann, thet's all. Larsen, he's a good man, too, but he's th' worryin' kind."

"You'll have to tell him to be patient for just a little while. I don't know what I'm going to do." She dropped her hand, and her fingers touched the butt of a revolver in his belt. "Why, Clem, you're wearing a gun! Why?"

"It was yore pa's. I ain't got no gun, an' I made free t' take his'n outa th' wagon." He lowered his voice. "You know an' I know whut's under th' seat-box, Miss Ann. Question is, does anybody else know it or s'picion it. Y' got enough trouble 'thout havin' t' worry 'bout that, so I figgered I'd jest stay kinda close an' keep a gun closer."

"It's a lot of money," she said thoughtfully.

"There's plenty w'd cut a dozen throats f'r th' half of it!" He grinned, and she could see the flash of his yellow fangs in the dim light.

"There's no real need of either of us having to worry about it. We'll get it out tomorrow, and I'll deposit it with Wells-Fargo. It will be safe there, and I can get it no matter where I might be."

"I've heard worse idees, Miss Ann. Hard money, or gold, is t' some men like th' taste of blood to a dog; once they git th' flavor of it they go plumb crazy."

"I'll bank it. I don't believe I'd ever have thought of it if it hadn't been for you, Clem."

"I'd 've remembered. Ye'd better be turnin' in again, Miss

Ann. There's still close t' four hours till dawnin', an' ye can use th' sleep."

She slept, again to her surprise, and woke to find her brain clear and her body refreshed. She was still numb, the thought of her father's death was still a physical soreness rather than a mental agony, but she could think consecutively and reply sensibly to those who spoke to her. The Wells-Fargo Express office, Clem told her, was on Main Street next door to the Overland Stage station, but she informed Mrs. Miller only that it was necessary for her to visit the business district. The woman was scandalized—a bereaved daughter should remain in strict and crepe-shrouded seclusion until after the funeral—but her protests were unheeded. More, Ann declined any company. Only at the last moment did she make a partial concession and permit a carriage to be called from the Colorado Stables. The concession was less from propriety than necessity. Peter Carmeny's store of gold coin, in broad double eagles, approximated fifteen thousand dollars and weighed nearly fifty pounds.

"I can't go staggering up the street with that," she told Clem Talbot as she lifted the heavy carpetbag, "and I can't have you go along with me lugging it on your shoulder. Everybody would know just what it was, and they might wonder if we had more gold hidden in the wagon. Ask Mrs. Miller to send one of the children for a cab or carriage—there must be such things to be had here. I can carry the bag into the office myself."

There was little formality about the acceptance of the deposit. The clerk blinked when Ann opened the bag but did not question her as to the source of the coin or her right to possession.

"We don't often see so much gold coin out here, Miss Carmeny," he said as he completed the count. "Do you want to exchange it for drafts on San Francisco or New York or for a certificate of deposit?"

"The certificate, I think. That could be deposited again with any agent of the company, couldn't it?"

"Of course. You could draw against it just as you could against a draft."

She placed the paper he gave her in her pocketbook and left

the office. A tall man in a black frock coat and a huge white hat stood by the door inspecting the various schedules and notices posted there. The hat was high-crowned, very wide of brim, and pure white in color. She had noticed it, and its wearer, while waiting for the clerk to fill out the deposit certificate and could not recall ever having seen such a hat on any man. Men wore stiff beaver hats for street or formal wear, or black felts with low crowns and moderately wide brims for working in the sun and dust. None of them was white, and none was decorated, as was the stranger's hat, with a narrow piping of gold about the edge of the brim and with a deep band of what looked like plaited silver wire. He removed the hat and bowed as she passed.

"Excuse me, ma'am, I didn't see you," he said.

She knew very well that he had seen her, and as the driver turned his horses she saw that the man was standing in the door of the express office staring after her, the white hat still in his hand.

2

Peter Carmeny was buried the next day in the cemetery northeast of the city. Branches cut from mountain pines had been thrown over the mound of raw red earth beside the rectangular excavation. Ann was surprised to see that virtually all the California emigrants were there and a number of the members of the Mormon train. The men were solemn and uncomfortable in wrinkled store clothes brought from the trunks for this occasion; the women sniffled and wiped their eyes and noses and enjoyed hugely a vicarious grief and the nasal twang of the preacher's voice. The children's interests were in the deep hole and the casket on the brink.

"Is he in there, ma? Tell me, when are they gonna put him down the hole? When, ma?"

She could see quite clearly through the crepe veil. She noticed that the emigrants were gathered at one side of the grave, the Mormons on the other. They divided here, too, just as they kept apart on the trail and in camp. Thomas Medbridge was there,

and close beside him was the young woman who had illustrated the truths of Mormonism by reading from the Book of Daniel. Grace Easton, that was her name. Elder Medbridge did not seem to be aware of her presence. Ann did not see the other elders, Scholl and Dempsey, but there were three men, all strangers, who stood directly across from her. She watched them through the veil, and from beneath lowered lids, while the preacher waited for the last of the spectators to straggle up the long hill to the benchland. Two were well dressed in decent black broadcloth and held flat-brimmed beaver hats in their hands. One was tall and sallow, with blazing dark eyes set too closely to a long Yankee nose which twitched like a rabbit's whenever he whispered to his companion, who was a roly-poly little man with the largest, whitest beard Ann had ever seen. He had bright evil little eyes, which were never still, and the white beard covered him from the eyes to halfway down his breast—in a fur-trimmed red coat he would look like St. Nicholas. He must be proud of that beard, she thought; it was carefully brushed and each individual hair seemed to gleam in the sunlight. The third man, standing behind those two, looked as though he might have left his plow standing in the furrow while he went to the funeral. He was roughly dressed in faded homespun garments, and his trousers were stuffed into flat-heeled boots that were crusted with dried mud. He was short and burly and gave the impression of immense physical strength. He too was bearded—a long untrimmed beard heavily sprinkled with gray—and when he removed his soiled black hat Ann saw that he had long hair, braided and coiled about his round skull and gathered into a close knot at the back of his head. None of the three had been with the wagon train, and she wondered why they should have attended Peter Carmeny's funeral.

Funeral . . . funeral . . . why, yes, that was why they were all here; to bury Peter Carmeny. He was dead, and they were burying him . . . something that had been her father lay in this box at her feet, and she found herself praying for some sign that would be proof that there was indeed a life eternal and

glorious beyond this square hole in the reddish soil. There was none.

... "And this mortal body has put on immortality and this corruptible flesh has gained incorruptibility" ... those were just words. Peter Carmeny was dead, and all the words in the world couldn't alter that fact. He was dead. She shifted her weight from one foot to the other, and Mrs. Miller grasped her arm.

"You're bearin' up fine, Ann dearie. Don't let go of yourself now."

"I won't," she whispered and felt the grip on her elbow relax. Why should she let go of herself? This wasn't Peter Carmeny they were going to put into that hole in the ground. Peter Carmeny was dead, and none of these people seemed to realize it. What they had here was polished oak with a lining of satin and something that looked like her father but only in the same way that the little fat man with the white beard looked like St. Nicholas. Who were those men, and why should they stare at her so fixedly? Through the crepe she could see them watching her; and once the little fat one seemed to nod, and his beard waved like a towel on a clothesline. ... 'Lige Miller had been drinking. He was breathing heavily, impressed by the solemnity of the occasion, and she could hear him pant and could smell the whisky on his breath ... "And in Christ's resurrection from the dead is the glorious promise that all who believe in Him shall also rise" ... she guessed her father had believed in Him, although he'd never said much about it. He wasn't like Thomas Medbridge that way. ... It was too bad that Thomas Medbridge was a Mormon; she liked him, and she could have liked him very much, but she couldn't like a Mormon that much ... "ashes unto ashes, dust unto dust" ... she'd have to pay that preacher. She hadn't thought of it before. How much? Ten dollars, I guess ... "and I commit to earth ... let us pray. O God, who ruleth the heavens and the earth, we beseech Thee to look down" ... this must be the end. Yes, the undertaker and his assistants were lowering the casket now. She must pay the undertaker, too. The casket was going down the hole, jerkily,

as the men payed out on the ropes. Sophronia Miller was tugging at her arm.

"We can go now, dearie. He's at rest, the dear man, and I've always said the awfulest part of funerals is to hear the first shovels of dirt going down and rattling on the coffin. Let's git away—and where in tarnation has that driver got to? He should 've waited right here. Here comes Mis' Dager an' Mis' Johnson t' speak t' you, Ann dearie."

"Let's go away. I don't want to talk to people. Not now."

She turned toward the cemetery gates nor saw that the two men who had faced her across the grave followed. Behind them, rolling like a bear as he walked, was the burly graybeard with the long hair.

"There's our kerridge—over th' other side of th' road. 'Lige, you go tell him t' come over here. There's no call f'r Ann an' me t' walk any further in this dust an' heat. I declare, it c'n be as hot here in th' Rocky Mountains as in Illinois."

Miller stepped into the roadway, and the two women waited. It seemed to Ann that many things happened simultaneously. She saw Miller halt beside the carriage and saw, rather than heard, the driver arguing with him. At the same moment the tall, grim-looking man and the little St. Nicholas stepped to the road's edge and halted, facing her. One of them—it was the tall one, and his voice had a disagreeable nasal whine—spoke:

"Miss Carmeny, ain't it? I want t'—"

There was more, for his lips continued moving, but that was all she heard. Someone shouted, and the carriage across the street was suddenly in motion. There was a man on the seat beside the driver, a man in a black coat and a huge white hat. He had taken the reins, and he swung the team sharply and pulled the horses to their haunches right in front of where she and Mrs. Miller were standing. The two strangers had to jump back—and then the white-hatted man stepped over the wheel and down to the ground. The tall man and St. Nicholas were standing far back now, close to the cemetery fence, and the place where they had been was occupied by their long-haired

companion. The white-hatted man spoke. His words, and the reply thereto, were meaningless.

"Better keep your nose dry, Port."

"I reckon to."

That was all. Odd words, but apparently both understood them, for Long-hair turned aside and White-hat held open the door of the carriage and aided the two women to the rear seat. He was very strong. His hand cupped Ann's elbow, and it was as though he were lifting her clear of the ground and then lowering her to the shabby leather cushions.

"You know where you got these two ladies"—he was speaking to the driver now—"take them back there and don't stop along the way for anybody. Then come to the Salt Lake House. Don't be too long. I don't want to have to come after you—brother!"

The carriage jerked and lurched as the driver brought his whip down across the horses' rumps. They dashed down the hill, and Mrs. Miller clung to the hand-strap and gasped, and gasped again. "I declare! What goin's on are those for a Christian funeral—and where's 'Lige?"

As the carriage clattered over the bridge spanning the City Creek Canal, she took a fresh grip on the hand-strap and poked the driver vigorously in the back.

"You! What happened to my husband—th' feller that came over t' git you?"

"I dont' know, sister."

"Don't you 'sister' me, you jimber-jawed Latter Day galoot! Where'd my husband git to?"

"I don't know." The man turned his head and shouted. "Maybe he went off with—with him."

"With who, fr Gawd's sake? D'you mean that feller with th' white hat? Who is he?"

"Him?"

"Yes, him—d'ye think I meant Brigham Young an' his forty-seven wives? Don't try t' tell me y' don't know him, either."

"No, ma'am. He's a Gentile—a gamblin' man. He's th' one that killed Hanlon. His name's Minor—Jesse Minor."

Elijah Miller returned to the camp as his wife and Ann were finishing their second cup of tea. He walked too steadily, too carefully, and a fatuous smile seemed etched on his face.

"Lige Miller, you been drinkin' again!"

"I hev." He pondered a moment, then repeated the confession. "I sure hev. None of this yere Valley Tan panther-pis'n, neither. It was honest Monongahela whisky, an' th' bottle on th' table an' pour y'rself a dram whenever ye was so minded. 'Jest charge it t' me," he says—"

"Who says? Y're fuller of talk than ye are of hard liquor, 'Lige, and that's a plenty, God knows. I ain't seen ye so sunny drunk since th' day we sold th' farm, an' I ain't got the heart t' larrup ye over th' skull with this kittle like I ought to. Set down."

Elijah sat down.

"Them two fellers," he announced, "was 'postles."

"Was whut?"

"'Postles, Twelve a-postles—like Matthew, Mark, Luke, an' John."

"Oh—fr'm whut I hear they're commoner out here than black-snakes in a berry patch. Whut did they want with us?"

"I dunno. Jess, he don't know either. He's a-ponderin' on it. He sent a coupla fellers out a-snoopin' f'r him, too. Told 'em there was sure a skunk somewhere under th' henhouse an' not t' rest till they'd kicked him out in th' open an' seen th' color of his stripes."

"Do you mean that man who—who interfered there at the gate of the cemetery?" Ann asked. "The driver said his name was Jesse Minor."

"Yes, ma'am." Miller regarded her owlishly and finally achieved identification. "G'd evenin', Miss Ann. Yes, that's who I mean. He's a ring-tailed son—somethin'-'r-other, Jesse is. He mout be comin' down here later. He said he mout."

He turned expectantly as a man rounded the end of the wagon.

"Oh, it's you, Clem."

"Yeah. C'n I have a word with yuh, Miss Ann?"

She excused herself and walked a few paces toward her own wagon.

"Them two fellers yonder"—Talbot's voice was a hoarse whisper—"are askin' f'r you. I told 'em y' were just back from buryin' yore pa t'day an' weren't havin' visitors an' they c'd state their business t' me, but they say they got t' see you personal. One of 'em says he's from Wells-Fargo, t'other claims t' be a deppity 'r constable of some sort. I figgered mebbe y'd better find out whut they want."

Ann recognized the express company clerk who had accepted her deposit the day before. He seemed nervous and glanced frequently toward his companion, but explained courteously enough that information had been lodged with the company to the effect that the coin was the property of the estate of Peter Carmeny, deceased, and not of Ann Carmeny. The money could not be accepted under those conditions, he said. A will must be filed for probate and letters of administration applied for. His companion was a court deputy who would inventory the property and hold all valuable or negotiable assets.

Talbot's rumbling whisper, protesting more and more loudly as the glib explanation proceeded, became definitely hostile.

"Don't tell 'em nothin', Miss Ann. I don't like that fat feller's looks f'r nothin'."

"I've had a very trying day, gentlemen," she said cautiously. "Can't your business wait until tomorrow?"

"No, ma'am," said the alleged deputy promptly. "My orders are t' make an inventory now."

"Orders? May I ask what orders?"

"I'm actin' on official records," the man asserted importantly. "Certificate reports th' decease of Peter Carmeny, emigrant, in this camp. He left proppity, and there hasn't been no will filed. Wells-Fargo reports th' deposit of fifteen thousand dollars in gold coin which was b'lieved t' have been th' proppity of th' deceased. That makes it a business f'r th' court."

"Lemme tell him off, Miss Ann," Talbot begged.

"No, Clem." She faced the men again. "It seems to me that this is a matter for lawyers to decide. I will retain a lawyer tomorrow morning—will that be satisfactory?"

Both men spoke at once. The deputy said, "No!" The express clerk exclaimed, "What about this?"

He raised into clearer view a heavy leather satchel which had been on the ground between his feet.

"I can't turn this over to nobody," he whined, "until I get back that certificate of deposit."

"Is that the money I deposited with you?" Ann asked.

"Yes, ma'am. You'll have to take it and give me back the certificate of deposit."

She shook her head, suddenly more confident.

"I won't do it—not until I see what a lawyer says."

The clerk stared at her for a moment, then turned to his companion.

"I'm going back," he exclaimed. "I don't care what you say, I'm not walking the streets with fifty pounds of gold on my shoulder—not me. I was a fool ever to take it out."

He seemed nervous as he waited for the other man's reply. The deputy was a stout individual with light blue eyes under a shock of uncombed reddish brown hair. His mustache was red and bristling. He too stared at Ann, then transferred his gaze to the wagon and with some show of ostentation consulted a paper which he drew from his pocket. Ann heard the sound of footsteps behind her, then Elijah Miller's voice as he spoke to Clem Talbot.

"Whut is it, Clem? Whut's them jaspers up to?"

Talbot sniffed before replying.

"Say, you're prime, pardner! Them? I dunno exactly, but it looks like they're tryin' t' run some sort of rhinekaboo on Miss Ann. I'm standin' by t' call their hands soon's they overplay 'em."

"Not now, Clem, please." Ann was frightened. Her father had once employed a man with eyes of the same flat pale blue as the deputy's and had discharged him for revolting cruelty to a horse. Her momentary confidence was waning; the man was as

confident as she, and he was sinister in his assurance. Some of her fear seemed to pass to Miller.

"I don't like th' looks of this!" he exclaimed, and with the words broke into a run toward the dirt road on the northern side of the square. He was really running, too. It was unbelievable that a drunken man could make such speed. He was drunk, but he could run like a spurred horse. Ann saw him swerve to avoid collision with a woman who stepped out from between two wagons; he slid, stiff-kneed, for at least a yard, and the dirt leaped from beneath his feet.

"I'm goin' to inventory th' stuff you've got here"—she turned quickly as the deputy spoke—"everything to the last coffee bean or tenpenny nail. You heard me, miss?"

Talbot snarled, and she commanded him again to be silent. He was a faithful but surly dog, obedient to his mistress' voice but nonetheless eager to fly at the throat of this intruder.

"I heard you," she said quietly.

Over his shoulder the man flung an order to the Wells-Fargo clerk to remain where he was. He stalked to the wagon and went through the motions, at least, of noting the various articles there—the ax, the cooking pots, the pile of ox yokes and chains, and all the impedimenta of the campsite.

"Where's John Larsen?" Ann whispered.

"I dunno. He was with me t' th' buryin', but he didn't come back here. Miss Ann, if that feller goes t' climb in our wagon I sure aim t' tangle with him."

"No, no! It would only make trouble, Clem. There would be a fight—"

"Yo're dead right there, ma'am!"

"And so long as he just inventories what is in the wagon he can't do any harm."

"That c'tificate?" His lips barely moved.

"He won't find it in the wagon, if that's what he's after. I have it here, in my dress. If he asks me about it I'll tell him that I mailed it away—to Sacramento."

"Y' shoulda told 'em that in th' first place. Say, whut's this a-comin'?' A real Mex'kin sombre-ero!"

He pointed, and Ann saw the tall figure of the man she knew as Jesse Minor. He was walking swiftly, the tails of his knee-length coat flapping with each stride. He passed so close to Ann that she could have touched him. The deputy, standing beside the wagon, turned at the sound of footfalls.

"Who're—" he began, and the speech died on his lips as Minor leaped.

There was no gunplay. The deputy's hand may have moved toward his belt—of that Ann could not be sure—but Minor's fingers closed on his wrist and jerked him off balance. As he staggered, the taller man shifted the grip to collar and belt, swung him into the air, and sent him crashing to the ground. Minor did more than throw the man, he hurled him; and the force of his collision with the hard-packed ground was his own weight multiplied by the power of Minor's long arms. Seconds passed while he lay there, dazed and shaken, then he painfully drew himself to his hands and knees. Minor spoke for the first time.

"Get out!" His voice cracked like a whiplash. "Both of you. Get out of here and stay out if you want to keep healthy. I'm taking cards in this game, and I play a hand all the way through."

"This gold," the clerk faltered, "I was told I couldn't—"

"You can tie it around your neck and jump in the lake. You can eat it if you want to. It's Wells-Fargo's worry and none of mine. Get out!"

The deputy rose slowly, and his right hand stole beneath his coat. Ann caught her breath, but the gambler seemed to have eyes in the back of his head.

"Don't do it"—the words were almost pleading—"you poor fool, I don't want to kill you, but I surely will if you go for that gun you're thinking about."

"Who are you?" the man asked, and the express clerk answered the question: "That's Jesse Minor."

The man looked as though he were about to be sick. He withdrew his hand and spread the fingers wide as though to prove beyond any doubt that they were empty.

"I've been away," he muttered. "Over t' Grantsville. I—I didn't know—"

"Get out!" Minor watched the pair as they almost ran from the camp, the heavy valise banging against the clerk's knees as he trotted after the unburdened deputy. A slow smile spread over Minor's face, and he swept the white hat from his head and bowed to Ann. He bowed like Jeff Crittenden, she thought, deeply and gracefully and almost reverently.

"My apologies for interfering again, Miss Carmeny, but the only thing to do with fellows like that is to get the jump on them first and let explanations come later."

"Then there is some explanation?"

"Some. May I present myself? I am Jesse Minor, once from Cincinnati, Ohio, at your service, ma'am."

She curtsied, not too deeply, as he bowed again. She could show him that she could be formal, too; that she was no ordinary emigrant woman, who could be disconcerted by courtly bows and gracious manners.

"I am Ann Carmeny, as you seem to know, and this is Clem Talbot, my employee and very faithful friend. Clem, will you get chairs from the wagon? I think that Mr. Minor and I will want to talk."

Chapter V

I.

MINOR FOLLOWED Clem Talbot to the wagon, and she stood waiting while the Missourian passed the chairs over the tail gate to the other man. She knew that Mrs. Miller was watching the scene and that other women were peering through convenient peepholes in ripped wagon-covers. In their eyes her conduct was scandalous—yet they must feel avid curiosity, too, about the fight and the identity of the white-hatted stranger. She didn't care. The false strength which had sustained her through the ordeal of the funeral and through the encounter

with the alleged deputy was draining slowly from her. She was as tense as an overdrawn bowstring without being conscious of that tautness of body and mind. Only a few hours had passed since the funeral, yet it seemed to have happened long ago. Ever since her hand had touched Peter Carmeny's cold face there had been a suspension of time. Things happened, but there was no chronological perspective—only the now. She knew that chairs would appear, that she would sit down and the white-hatted man would sit opposite her, and that something mysterious and disconcerting would be removed by the explanation of which he had spoken; in the meantime she waited.

Clem Talbot was in no hurry to get the chairs. It was necessary that he first praise Minor's decisive action and explain, at length, that his employer had restrained him from similar action. "I reckon yore way was th' best, suh. I'd prob'ly 've killed somebody, an' these Mormons don't take kindly t' Gentile killin's." Minor was "sir" to Clem, and Ann could not recall ever having heard that title of respect on the Missourian's lips. She smiled faintly, and each word and phrase slipped as uttered from this now into the background of things, crowding for place with other words just as Minor and Clem would in turn be replaced by other figures. . . . There had been a seedy preacher who had declaimed about the resurrection and the life, and a man who talked of courts and inventories, and Elijah Miller who was drunk and Jesse Minor who was sober, and there was sunlight beating warmly on her neck and throwing in long distorted outlines her shadow and the shadows of the two men and of the chairs which Minor took from Clem's hands. . . . Now she was sitting in one of those chairs, and Minor was in the other. He had placed his white hat on the ground and was looking at her from grave eyes.

"You're tired," he said.

"I—a little, perhaps."

"You're tired," he repeated, "and yet you won't snap. You'd be better off if you would snap and have it all over with, but you won't, not ever. You could be beaten with rods, like somebody was in the Bible, and you'd never cry out."

She did not reply. There was no answer to things like that.

"No," he continued, "even if you knew that nothing more would happen, you wouldn't go to bed now and sleep through until morning. You want to know things—and all I can tell you is just a little bit here and another little bit there, and you'll have to guess at the rest just like I do and fill in the blank spaces for yourself." He turned to Talbot. "Clem, is there any French brandy in the wagon?"

"Nope. That's a bottle of Pennsylvania rye, that I know, but nothin' fancy."

"Rye won't do. Here . . ." His fingers dipped into the pocket of his flowered silk vest, and a gold piece flickered in the air as it spun into Talbot's fingers. "Go up to Livingstone-Bell's and get a bottle of their best French brandy. Tell them the best and that it's for me—Jesse Minor. I'll boil up a pot of coffee while you're gone."

Talbot departed. He pocketed the half-eagle and obeyed the direct order without a word, and Ann smiled again. Minor brought an armload of wood from the supply beneath the wagon and began whittling shavings from a stick of dry pine.

"Is your name a charm?" she asked. "If I shouted 'Jesse Minor' loud enough would the Salt Lake dry up or a turnpike be opened through the mountains?"

"And just what makes you ask that?"

"Many things. Those men at the cemetery, for instance. There were three of them—a thin man and a little fat one with a big beard and another man that had his hair done up in a knot like a woman's. And there was the man that was driving our carriage and the two men that were here and now Clem Talbot. Father hired Clem before we left St. Joseph, and I never saw him take orders like an errand boy before now. The charm worked with him just like it did with the others. You said 'Jesse Minor,' and he jumped to obey you."

"Whatever Clem did was for you, I think." He had arranged the shavings and some kindling in the ashes and now knelt by them, a match in his fingers. "I'm going to boil water for coffee,

strong coffee, and I want you to drink a big cup of it with a good lacing of brandy."

"And if I don't—I'm really not in the habit of taking strong drink—you'll just say 'Jesse Minor,' and the coffee and brandy will go down my throat. It is a charm, then!"

"Of course not." The fire was making little friendly crackling noises in the kindlings, and he laid a larger stick behind the rising flames. "It worked, as you call it, because—well, because—"

"Because those men were all afraid of you," she supplied. "Is that why?"

"Maybe." He straightened his back. The fire was blazing now, and he pushed two logs into position at either side and placed the sooty coffeepot on them.

"That sounds vain—as though you were proud of making men fear you. You're not like a man that was at Platte Forks, are you, Mr. Minor? His name was Slade."

"That's Joe Slade. 'Cap' Slade, some call him. He's nothing but a loud-mouthed drunken bluffer that would back down in a hurry, I'll bet, if his hand was ever called. No, Miss Carmeny, I hope I'm not like Slade."

He sat down in the other chair and rolled a Spanish cigarette of flaky tobacco in an oblong piece of cornhusk. She had heard of them but had never seen one made. His long fingers moved swiftly, deftly.

"Talbot will be back pretty soon," he said, "but there's time to tell you a few things that maybe will help. I came here a couple of months ago after being in and around California for close on five years. Men have got around this mountain country a lot in that time, and the place to find out about the new country is here, not in San Francisco or the pueblos down south. Great Salt Lake City is the biggest crossroads in all the West. It's the crossing of the Overland Road and the road to Fort Hall and Oregon and the Old Spanish Trail that comes up from the south with one fork going to Los Angeles and the other branching clear to Santa Fe. All sorts of men ride those trails and stop over here, and I wanted to talk to them.

"Well, there was a fellow named Hanlon here. He called himself Snake River Hanlon, and he was pretty near as poison-mean as he made out to be. He wore two big guns, tied down, and he allowed that he was sudden death with either hand and that he wouldn't take anybody's backwash. He'd been around here for some time, and most folks believed him and gave him all the room he wanted. Hanlon and I had an argument—two arguments. The first was over a hand of cards; the second might sound simple to you, but he didn't like my hat. I had to kill him."

"You killed him!" she gasped. "Over a hat?"

"It boiled down to that. I was to get out of town and take my hat with me just because he said so. I told him I didn't choose to go, and finally he went for his guns. There were witnesses present, and I didn't want there to be any mistake about it being self-defense, so I let him get them clear of the scabbards—and then I killed him."

"How?" She was rigid with horror, but she had to ask the question.

"By getting my own guns out a mite faster. Short guns. I don't think he knew I had them." He flipped the lower edge of his silk vest up and down again, and she saw, briefly, the smooth ivory butts of two revolvers above the waistband of his pantaloons.

"It seemed like folks here hadn't ever seen short guns carried like that and used fast. They made a lot out of it." There was a boyish simplicity in his speech. So might a thirteen-year-old tell of running faster or of staying under water longer than any of his contemporaries. Here, sitting in the late afternoon sunlight, it was difficult to reconcile those words with anger and men's passions and with death. "Hanlon had come to be pretty well known here," he went on, "and I found out that I was better known. I'd come here to find out things, but I'd run into plenty of blind alleys. The Mormons won't talk, and the Gentiles that have to live here are just about as close-mouthed. Then—after the Hanlon business—I didn't find any more blind alleys. When I asked questions they were answered, and when I wanted to

find something out there were plenty of fellows who were willing to do a little spying around for me. I—" He broke off suddenly.

"Here comes Clem," he said. "On the high lope, too, and just as the coffee's boiling." He moved the pot out of the flame, stirred the brew, and dashed in some cold water to settle the grounds. "That's about all the story, Miss Carmeny. Some men are like dogs—full of fight until a whiplash pops or somebody picks up a rock. Those fellows today weren't afraid of Jesse Minor. They were thinking of Snake River Hanlon and of two short guns, and they were scared of their own thoughts."

"I'll get the cups for you," she said. Talbot was almost within earshot, and there was no time to argue distinctions so subtle as those he presented. This Jesse Minor was a braggart, but a singularly efficient one. He had helped her when the men of the wagon train hid behind their wagons in fear of conflict with the laws of Utah of which they had heard so much and so unfavorably. Moreover, this Jesse Minor seemed to hold the key to the peculiar events of that day.

"Please don't move," he exclaimed. "I'll get the cups—please."

She relaxed again in the chair.

"Shouldn't you say: 'Sit down! I'm Jesse Minor and I order it?'"

"Not to you. That would be popping the whiplash, and I don't think I'd ever want to pop a lash at you. The cups should be in this box unless your wagon is different from any that ever crossed the Plains."

He filled a cup and poured into it about an ounce of the brandy.

"Drink it, please, Miss Carmeny. I'm telling only the truth when I say it will help you more than any medicine a doctor could give you."

"All right—but just for the sake of appearances you should take some too, you and Clem."

"Sure. How about it, Clem? Did you ever drink coffee laced with brandy?"

"Can't say 's I have, but I'm willin'. Likker whut costs 's

much 's that there is bound t' be good no matter whut it's mixed with."

The coffee was black and strong, and the rich odor of the brandy was in the steam which rose from the cup. Ann drank and did not protest when Minor refilled her cup and again added the liquor. The man was right, she admitted to herself, she had been tired. She had driven her body ever since Peter Carmeny had been stricken on the other side of South Pass, and the events of these last few days had driven her brain to a similar fatigue. Now, gradually but perceptibly, she could feel that tension relaxing.

"You'll rest tonight," Minor said.

"I think I will. I feel better already, enough so to ask you who were those men who came up to us at the gate of the cemetery and what did they want?"

"The thin one was named Kimball; white-whiskers is named Hyde; and the rough-looking character with the long hair is rather famous in these parts—Porter Rockwell."

"What did they want?"

"I'd have to guess, and I'm not ready to. I'd rather start by telling you that the most foolish thing you ever did in your life was when you dropped that sack of gold coin on the Wells-Fargo counter."

"Foolish? I think it would have been much more foolish to have left it where it was. It won't do any harm to tell you that my father carried it hidden in the wagon."

"Too bad you didn't leave it there. People out here aren't used to seeing gold coin in such amounts as that. I happened to be in the express office when you came in, and the sight of a young girl, alone, lugging a small fortune in gold nearly floored me. I heard your name when the clerk spelled it out, and I took it on myself to find out who you were. I thought then that the news of that gold was bound to get around, and it did. Other people made inquiries about you—with different motives."

"You mean—" She hesitated, then started afresh: "Are you trying to tell me that some of these people out here, these Mormons, are trying to steal that money?"

"I wouldn't say steal, and I wouldn't say Mormons—not in the way you do. What it adds up to is that anybody with that much money is fair game. The trouble was that you'd deposited it with Wells-Fargo, so somebody—and I'm telling you honestly that I don't know who—tried to bluff you into taking it back. Just what story did those two fellows tell you? I couldn't make sense out of what Miller said except that you were in trouble and needed me."

"Did he tell you that?"

"Yes."

"I didn't send him—he went of his own accord. As to the men—" She outlined briefly how the one had posed as a court deputy.

"And I'll bet there isn't a court in Utah Territory that knows anything about it," Minor said as she concluded. "All he wanted was to find that certificate of deposit and then bluff you into taking back the coin." He rolled another cigarette. "It doesn't make sense—this out-and-out bluff coming so close on what happened at the cemetery. I hate to guess, too."

"I wish you would. I'll admit that it frightens me a little. I've heard so many horrible stories about the Mormons."

"You talk like all strangers here and like some people who've been here long enough to know better—as though the Mormons were a race just like Chinese or Negroes. They're not. Most of them are Americans just like you and me and Clem here—"

"I ain't like no Mormonite as was ever whelped!" Clem growled.

"—and some are pretty fine citizens, and others are capable of any sort of meanness or crime. You'll find the same sort of people in Cincinnati or Philadelphia—don't tar them all with the same brush because of religion. Joe Smith and what he taught them to believe haven't got anything to do with what you're up against."

He was about to say more, but she raised her hand.

"Let me try to think, please." The uncertainty and tension had returned. This man had been of service to her—or had he?—

and why? All she knew of him was that he was a professional gambler and that he had killed a man. A gambler and a gunman would be just as eager to lay hands on her gold as those conspirators of which he hinted so vaguely. She had been frightened when that stranger threatened to ransack her wagon, and she had felt suddenly confident when she had seen Minor approaching, yet the one emotion was reasonable and the other unreasonable. Why should she be so inclined to trust a white-hatted gambler? She wasn't a child to be swayed by conspicuous clothes and a handsome tanned face and a courteous manner of speaking. . . .

"You've been very kind, Mr. Minor," she said at last, "but I don't think things are quite as serious as you make them out to be. After all, I've got a deposit certificate from Wells-Fargo—"

"Where is it?"

"Here." She touched the bosom of her dress and was instantly angry. *I'm Jesse Minor, tell me what I want to know*—and she had told him!

"It's as good as the gold itself," she said. "I can deposit it anywhere, and Wells-Fargo will honor it."

"That's right enough." He seemed to make the admission reluctantly, to be on the point of saying more and then deciding to be silent.

"I could go on to California with these people"—she waved her hand toward the long rows of wagons—"or I could go back east, or I could even sell my wagon and stock here and go east or west on the stage. Other women have made the trip alone."

He admitted again that she was right, and again she felt that he was thinking of other things. He rose and stood beside her chair.

"You won't be bothered any more tonight, Miss Carmeny"—*how could he be so sure of everything?*—"and if I hear anything that I think you ought to know I'll send you word or come and tell you myself."

"Thank you," she said, then added impulsively: "thank you for everything. I'm grateful, really I am." He took the hand she extended and held it a moment, then turned away.

"Good-by. So-long, Clem."

"So-long, Jess."

She watched him walk along the lane between the wagons. The emigrants, busy now with supper, turned their heads as he passed. Gossip about him—and about her—had already started, Ann knew, and there would be little talk in the camp tonight other than that of the fight at the Carmeny wagon and of the stranger who had sat so long in talk there. There was the bottle, too. It stood on the camp table, and the last direct rays of the sun threw a mottled golden reflection of tawny liquor on the empty cups.

"Put that away some place, Clem," she ordered.

"Yes'm." His fingers closed about the bottle neck, and he climbed over the wheel and the front seat. When he appeared again he was licking his lips. "Seems t' me," he drawled, "that it would've been only manners after whut he done fr us t' ask him t' stay an' eat with us. There's plenty grub."

"But maybe I didn't want him to stay, Clem. Maybe I didn't want him to eat with us."

The Missourian did not answer directly.

"I shore admire a feller that goes straight about th' business he's got in hand," he observed. "He come here t' throw them fellers out an' he done it. There's some would've wasted time talkin' to 'em. 'Whut do ye want here?' they'd 've said. 'Git out 'r I'll throw ye out!' an' talk like that. Not Jess. He did his throwin' first an' his talkin' later."

"I'm glad that he did it before I had to call on you, Clem," she said, and Talbot grinned as his slightly injured pride was healed. "But, after all, Clem, I don't know the man, and there wasn't any call for me to invite him to eat with us." *Why should she so explain herself to Talbot?* "He's a professional gambler, and I can't really approve of gambling as a way of making a living, and what's more, he killed a man. Just a short time ago, right here in Great Salt Lake City. Shot him."

"I'm bettin' it wasn't in th' back—not him. There's a heap worse things than killin', Miss Ann—"

"'Thou shalt not kill,'" she quoted primly. "That's in the Bible, Clem, and it's certainly plain enough."

"Yep—an' right in th' same place ye'll find somethin' 'bout bearin' false witness. Me, if'n I had t' line up with somebody, it'd be with th' feller that wasn't afraid t' stand up an' fight an' kill if he had to 'fore it'd be with th' false witness."

"Oh, build up the fire, Clem," she said irritably. "It'll be dark in a few minutes, and we must get our supper. Let's not stand here arguing about what's right or what's wrong with a man we'll probably never see again."

"Yes'm." He stirred the still-hot embers and laid some light wood on them. "I wouldn't go bettin' too heavy on not seein' him again, though. He was worried 'bout you, Miss Ann."

"If he wants to worry I can't stop him. I certainly am not worried about myself."

"He is, though." Clem Talbot was not of those who relinquish the final word. "Thet's whut makes th' difference."

2

She remained in the camp and close to her own wagon throughout the next two days. She rested, and as she rested her confidence returned. Nothing happened, and she told herself that nothing was going to happen—the visit of the two men had been only what Minor had called it, a bluff to force her to release the Wells-Fargo deposit certificate. She managed to explain the matter to Mrs. Miller without mentioning the existence of the gold, and she made her father's death an excuse for not attending the meeting at which the emigrants elected John Kruger, an Illinois man, to succeed Phineas Johnson as captain of the train over the remainder of the journey to California. She saw nothing particularly significant in Mrs. Miller's report of that meeting.

"An' w'd you guess who was there, Ann? Y' never w'd. It was that little stout-built man with the long hair that we seen up to th' cemetery. He didn't say nothin' 'r do nothin'—jest sat on a wagon tongue an' listened to th' talk. Folks will be better satis-

fied with Kruger as captain, I think. He'll git things done just as fast without so much bossin' an' yellin'."

Later in the day Kruger called at her wagon. She had finished supper and put away the dishes, and was sitting by the fire watching the shifting colors of sunset over the high peaks to the east and south. The two men, Talbot and Larsen, were perched on the wagon tongue. Larsen had offered no explanation for his long absence after the funeral.

"We been talkin' things over, my wife and I," Kruger began, "and we think we'd be better off buyin' a new wagon as tryin' to repair the old one. You'd think iron was gold from the prices they put on it out here. Would you care to put a price on your wagon, Miss Carmeny—the wagon and one team? We couldn't afford St. Joe prices, but we'd try to be fair."

"But I can't do without a wagon, Mr. Kruger," she said in surprise. "I haven't really made up my mind—you can understand how my father's passing upset everything—but I might decide to go on to California with you people."

"I was given t' understand"—the man looked troubled—"that you weren't goin' on."

"I haven't decided," she repeated. "That's all I've told anyone, Mr. Kruger. I promise you, though, that if I do decide to go back east on the stage that you'll have first chance to bid on the wagon and the stock."

"Mebbe we can make out with what we've got," Kruger muttered. "And—if you do figger on goin' to Californy, miss, will you come and see me first thing?"

"Yes, of course," said Ann. She thought that the man looked decidedly ill at ease but credited it to disappointment that he did not immediately obtain the desired wagon. She was to learn that the visit from the train captain had been the beginning of things. In the morning, the morning of the third day after her father's funeral, Talbot came to her.

"There's somethin' funny goin' on," he said abruptly. "I was visitin' round last night—not fur, but fur enough t' pass th' time of day with a few fellers—an' I heard talk. Miss Ann, these

here folks don't want ye t' go on t' Californy with 'em. They jest don't want ye."

"But why, Clem?"

"Same's I asked 'em, 'thout gittin' much by way of answer. 'She's got th' best wagon an' teams in th' outfit,' I says t' Dawson—ther sandy-haired feller whut has th' three red-headed girls—an' she's got th' best an' th' second-best teamsters there is in me an' John Larsen. Whut's th' idee?' All he did was mumble round like he had a fishbone caught in his gullet. He didn't know why, he says, an' mebbe I'd better see Kruger, him bein' th' captain."

"And what did Kruger say?"

"I didn't see him. His wagon's clear up t' th' other end of camp, an' I didn't want t' git that far from home."

"Wait until I get my bonnet, Clem. We'll go see Kruger together, now."

They found the captain working beside his wagon. He was a saddler and harness maker by trade, and was sitting at his bench in the middle of a pile of broken tugs, collars, and breeching. He was one of the few in the train who had used horses in preference to oxen over the long haul from St. Joseph.

"I came to tell you that I've just about concluded to go on to California with you," Ann told him. Kruger laid down his awl and the waxed end.

"I've been hopin' you'd make up your mind to go back east, Miss Carmeny," he said slowly. "It'd make things easier all round. There's some of us owe you a lot f'r help over th' hard places. I, f'r one, might still be tryin' to git up the hill at the Big Mountain if you hadn't sent your teams to help me—but there's other things to consider."

"What things? Out with it," she demanded.

"I was told you were stayin' here for a spell," he said, "there bein' some matters of law 'bout your pa's property."

"That wasn't true."

"That ain't f'r me to say. There's a couple of hundred people in this train, miss, and all of them's wishful to see Californy

'fore snow flies. We can't afford, none of us, to be delayed by lawin'."

"But you won't be—there'll be no lawin', as you call it."

"That ain't f'r me t' say," he repeated. He was as deliberate and stolid as an ox. "All I know is that I was told that if we set out, and you was with us, the whole lot would be brought back here and here we'd be kept till the lawin' was over."

"That's silly—you were foolish even to listen to such a thing."

"Silly or not, I was told it—and I'm old enough to be your father, miss, and I'd be thankful if you remembered it and was a mite more respectful. There's others in this train besides me, and I put it up to them. Yesterday. They agreed with me that we got to think of ourselves and our families ahead of you. We can't stop you from goin' to Californy—the road's free—but we can tell you that we can't take you with this train. That's final, too!"

Others overheard that interview or guessed the reason for her visit to Kruger's wagon. Ann knew that they were watching her as she walked to her own camp.

"I c'd git th' stock in from pasture in a couple of hours, Miss Ann," Talbot remarked. "We c'd—"

"No, there's something else I want to do first, Clem. I'll have to change my clothes and go uptown."

"I'll go 'long with ye."

"No, Clem. It's just an experiment I want to try, and I can do it alone."

"I'm goin'. Don't waste yore breath argufyin', Miss Ann, it won't do ye no good. Yo're not walkin' round this town alone."

She dressed carefully and as a concession to convention allowed the crepe veil to remain on her bonnet, but draped it so that the black folds fell over her shoulders and did not shroud her face. It was a short walk, less than a mile, to the stores and other business establishments on either side of Main Street in the block south of Temple Square. A sign painted over the entire front of one building identified the offices of the Overland Stage Company.

"I wish to reserve a seat on the next stage to the east," she told the clerk, "all the way to St. Joseph."

"For yourself, ma'am?"

"Yes. The name is Carmeny, Miss Ann Carmeny."

"Miss Ann Carmeny." He repeated the words carefully and added: "Just a minute, please, ma'am."

His minute was an elastic period. She could hear the murmur of voices behind the partition which cut across the office but—although she tried desperately to eavesdrop—could not distinguish the words. At last the clerk returned.

"I'm sorry, ma'am, but we won't be able to take care of you. Every seat is taken."

"I'm sorry too." She wanted to reach across the counter and shake him, but she controlled her voice and her anger. "There is a stage going west tomorrow, isn't there? Could you give me a seat on it to Sacramento?"

There was no hesitation now, no consultation with invisible authorities behind the partition. The clerk said, "No, ma'am," politely but firmly, and Ann withdrew.

"Don't fume and swear like that, Clem," she said. "I'd have been surprised out of my shoes if anything else had happened. The idea came into my head while we were talking to Mr. Kruger, and there was only one way of finding out if I was right. I was—and so was Mr. Minor."

"You mean them fellers—"

"I'm afraid so. Somebody doesn't want me to leave Great Salt Lake City until they're quite ready to let me go."

"That's th' Salt Lake House right 'crost th' street, Miss Ann. Jess Minor, he hangs out there. D'ye want I should git him an' you c'd tell him 'bout this here business?"

"Heavens, no, Clem! There's no need, and, besides, I don't want to be indebted any more to that man. We'll go back to camp, and then you and Larsen can go out and get the oxen. The California Road is free, just as Mr. Kruger said, and we'll set out first thing tomorrow morning. If anybody dares to stop us I'll demand that they arrest us. Then they'll just have to throw the whole matter into the courts, and we'll know just who it is

that is persecuting us this way and why they're doing it. Can't you see?"

"Yes'm—leastways I reckon so. Looks t' me like yo're firin' a mighty big patch of brush t' drive out th' game, Miss Ann. I hope th' wind'll be in yore favor."

She laughed, and a solemn-faced old Mormon who was passing turned and stared at the strange sight of a young woman in a mourning veil who shrieked with half-hysterical laughter.

"I don't think they'll dare to stop us, Clem," she said at last. "To do that they'd have to have some sort of a warrant, and I don't think there's any excuse under which they could get one, even in Utah Territory. Somebody—I don't know who—is trying to frighten me into staying here, and then they'll try to make me pay a lot of money to take what's my own property and go on. It's just blackmail."

"Mebbe so. Anyway, y' seem t' have it worked out in yore own mind. I won't tell Larsen nothin' except that we're hittin' th' Californy road first thing in th' mornin'. That'll make him feel good, an' there's no use worryin' him with th' other business. He worries kinda easy, Miss Ann."

"There'll be nothing for him to worry about."

She was exultingly confident now. As soon as the two men had gone she changed her clothes and began repacking the boxes and trunks which had been opened since the arrival in Great Salt Lake City. There was so much that had been her father's—two almost new suits of clothes, shirts and underwear, stockings and shoes—surely there must be somewhere a needy person who would be glad to get such things. She laid the garments to one side and lifted the lid of another trunk. The afternoon was not unpleasantly warm, but the air under the canvas top of the wagon was overheated and stuffy. She pulled back the flaps at the rear and tied them to the bows, then leaned over the tail gate and breathed deeply of the fresh air. A roughly clad man stepped around the end of the wagon, so close to her that she could have touched the crown of his soiled hat.

Chapter VI

I

HER HAND FLEW to her throat, then was lowered as she recognized Thomas Medbridge.

"Oh, it's you, elder. You gave me a start. I didn't know anybody was near."

"I'm sorry if I frightened you. I saw no one around the wagon, and I was afraid that you had gone visiting and that I'd have to search all over the camp for you. I wanted to see you—to tell you good-by and to thank you."

"Why do you want to say good-by?" she asked quickly. Only she and Talbot knew of the decision to start for California in the morning; it was beyond all reason that anyone else should have learned of their purpose.

"There are chairs here—can't you sit down with me for just a minute? I'm going away, you know, going to see my mother. That's why I wanted to say good-by to you."

"Oh!" That was it, of course. That was why he was wearing the rough garments of the trail, not the expensive broadcloth in which she had last seen him. She gathered her skirts about her knees with one hand and climbed over the tail gate to the ladder. He raised his hand to steady her as she descended.

"There! I know that you're delighted to think that you're going to see your mother. It's been a long time, hasn't it?"

"Yes, a very long time. There are things I want to tell you—I feel I must tell you—but first I want to thank you."

"To thank me? I don't understand, elder."

"You must; but maybe you've forgotten. You must have spoken to someone about me because I asked leave to go and visit her and it was refused; and then your name was mentioned, and instantly all objections were removed. An express is leaving today for the southern settlements, and I am to go with him as far as Nephi where I can get a horse and take the trail to the Sevier."

She waited until he had finished and checked the impulse to tell him that he was speaking in riddles.

"Just how did it happen, elder," she asked quietly, "that permission was given you after it had been refused? I'm curious."

"I'll try to start at the beginning. As soon as I got here, of course, I made inquiries about my mother. I found that she had—that she was now living at Manti, which is one of the settlements on the Sevier River, and I asked leave to go and see her. I've been put to work at the printing office, but it seemed to me that matters there could wait a few weeks. I was surprised when I was told that I would have to defer seeing my mother until after the fall conference. It was a disappointment, but I hope that I am a good Saint and obedient to counsel. Then, late yesterday, a Brother Kimball called at the house where I am boarding. He is one of the sons of Apostle Heber Kimball, and he wanted to know all about our journey across the Plains and about the emigrants who came in company with us. He asked about your father—where your wagon had joined the company and how many men traveled with you and many other questions. I told him that I had come to know you very well on the road from the Little Sandy and that I hoped to visit you soon again because you had known only sorrow since arriving in Deseret"—*get to the point, elder, for goodness' sake*, she thought angrily, *you're delivering a sermon!*—"and this morning, while I was at work, Brother Kimball came to the printing office and told me that I was free to go to Manti today and to stay there as long as I wanted. He said that my superiors had been given excellent reports of my attentions—that was the word he used, Miss Carmeny—to you and your father and they felt I should be rewarded. I knew then that you must have spoken in my behalf."

Again she checked the hasty denial of any knowledge of the matter. Here was another mysterious incident, another proof that she and her affairs were of interest to someone in high authority. Thomas Medbridge, she reasoned shrewdly, had probably made no secret of his friendship for her—and he was promptly shipped away. She would fool them all! By another day they—and who were "they"?—would be forced either to permit her to go to

California or to come out in the open instead of plotting so secretly.

"Tell me of your mother, elder," she said at last. "I know that you're delighted that you'll see her again."

"Yes." He was silent for a moment. "I—yes, I must tell you, Miss Carmeny—I learned that she had married again. She is now the wife of a brother named Thales Thomsen, one of the Scandinavian Saints, in Manti."

"But I thought you said—"

"I know what you're thinking. Mother must have had her future life rather than her life here on earth in her thoughts."

"Do you mean that she is—that she made—"

"Brother Thomsen has taken two other wives. My mother is his third. Is that what you're trying to ask me?"

"Yes—I guess so. Because she is your mother, elder, and you have been very kind to me, will you tell her that I wish her every happiness?"

"I wish I thought you really meant that."

"I do. I wouldn't wish anyone unhappiness, and you have been kind to me."

He was turning his broad hat around and around; his eyes seemed fixed on the ax which Larsen had left sticking in a small log by the ashes of the campfire. *He's really only a boy. He's older than I am, but he looks like a small boy who is trying to keep from crying. I hope he doesn't cry.* He spoke at last, and his voice was harsh and strained. For the first time since she had known him the deep throbbing resonance was gone.

"It is all so sudden," he said. "I can't get used to thinking of my mother as a man's third wife. I'm sorry now that I ever consented to go to the foreign missions. I've been there ten years, you know, in England most of the time, and the doctrine of plural marriage seemed so different there."

"But you knew about it," she said gently.

"Of course. It was always the one point on which our enemies challenged us, and we studied those challenges carefully so that we could always answer them. The Saints in England made no plural marriages, and the whole question seemed more one of

doctrine. I wouldn't say it to anyone but you, but it's a shock to come here and to see the extent to which the doctrine is actually practiced and then to learn that my own mother has entered into it."

"But she must have known what she was doing!" Ann exclaimed, and instantly regretted the words.

"She was persuaded that it was for her soul's good—I am certain of that!" he said angrily. "If she was thinking of my father she must have known that the ordinances of the church would have permitted her to be sealed to him for all eternity."

"But your father is dead. He was not a Mor—a Latter Day Saint, was he?"

"No, but he could have been baptized. We recognize the baptism of the dead as it was preached by Paul to the Corinthians—how else can the souls of the dead gain salvation and glory? Father could have been baptized and have received his endowments by proxy. Mother could then have been sealed to him, and in the future life they would have been man and wife forever. She must have known that."

"Then why—"

"That is why I am going to Manti. My mother is a loyal Saint, and she tried a long time ago to convert everything my father left her into cash so that she could give testimony of her faith by turning it all over to the First President, Brother Brigham Young, as trustee-in-trust for the church. My uncle, her brother, stopped her from doing that. He sends her the rentals monthly."

He raised his head, and his boyish features were as though carved in granite. *He's a man. Heavens, I've been thinking of him as a little boy who was going to put his head in my lap and cry. He looks like Jesse Minor did! He's fierce, terrible. . . .*

"I want to talk with that man Thomsen. I've got to know who he is and why he married my mother. If it was just for her money, may the God of Israel have mercy on him!"

"You might find that she is very happy, Thomas."

"What did you call me?"

"Thomas. We've known each other long enough to drop some formalities, I think."

"And may I call you Ann?"

"Of course you may."

"Thank you. I've wanted to call you by your name ever since I first learned it—back there on the Little Sandy. It's a beautiful name—Ann. It means 'gracious,' and we are told that it was the name of the mother of the Virgin Mary. If I may call you Ann what I came here to tell you will be easier. You see, my superiors in the church want me to be married."

"Already? They didn't give you much time to get settled here in Utah, did they?"

"Perhaps not, but I should have married long ago—my leaders didn't have to tell me that. There are countless souls crying out in the darkness and begging to be born into this world; it is my duty to God and my church and myself to help them."

"When you do find the girl you want to marry, Thomas," she said quietly, "don't tell her that."

"Tell her what? I don't understand."

"That you're marrying her just for the sake of—of unborn souls. A woman wants to feel that she's being married for herself. She wants a man to love her."

"But I would love her, of course. That is why I don't want to marry Sister Easton—you remember her, don't you? She was with the wagon train. She is a splendid young woman, and no one could be stronger in the faith; but I couldn't love her, and I don't want to marry her."

He leaned toward her, his hat falling to the ground and rolling unnoticed in the ashes of the campfire. His fingers closed on her hand.

"It's you, Ann! I've told myself—oh, I've knelt in prayer and told myself that I should not love a Gentile, but I do. I want you to be my wife."

"No, Thomas. You know I couldn't and wouldn't. You gave the reason yourself just now. I'm a Gentile—"

"But you wouldn't have to remain one, Ann. If you loved me you would waken in the faith and realize the truth and the soundness of the everlasting gospel. You could be baptized, and

we could take our endowments together and belong to one another for time and all eternity."

"Please!" She interrupted at his first pause. "You know I couldn't do it. Even if I loved you, Thomas, I couldn't become a Mormon—I just couldn't. There are things about it—and you believe in them—that are horrible to a woman."

"You mean the doctrine of a plurality of wives?"

"Of course. You can call it that; but to most people it's just plain polygamy, and it's horrible even to think about it. I don't care what you say, God doesn't approve of it."

"Nor does man!" he said thickly. "The Gentiles, I mean. That is why the hand of every man is raised against the Saints. I know that God revealed that ordinance to Joseph Smith, and yet"—he raised his eyes to hers—"I could never embrace polygamy, Ann. I'm not telling you that because I want you to marry me; no matter who I might marry I could never take a second woman and think of her as my wife. Perhaps I am weak in faith, but I'm not ashamed of it."

"And I respect you for it, Thomas." She held out her hand. "And now I think you'd better go—don't you agree?"

"Yes." He rose and stood beside her chair. "This—this means that I'll never see you again, Ann."

"Don't say 'never.' Your church has missions everywhere, and you might be sent to California or back to the eastern states or to many places where I might be. Even if we should never meet again, Thomas, I'll always remember you and like you. You were very kind to me and to my father."

He held her hands firmly for a moment, then released them and placed his palms on her head.

"May God hold you in His keeping and may His peace abide with you and His blessings follow you wherever you may go. May you—oh, I do love you! I do love you!"

He walked away, stumbling over the log in which the ax had been driven. She stood and watched him, as a few evenings before she had watched Jesse Minor's tall figure following the same lane between the wagons. And as then she saw the men and women of the camp turn and stare after the man who had

just left her, and saw Sophronia Miller's head appear suddenly through the arched canvas hood of the next wagon. Ann smiled and spoke, and the head disappeared. She spoke to Mrs. Harper, in the wagon beyond Miller's, and received a curt nod and nothing more. All of the women had been like that, Ann thought, ever since a day or so after her father's funeral. They acted as though the Carmeny wagon were a pesthouse. Well, let them! By tomorrow she'd be away from all of them. Away from Great Salt Lake City, too. Away from the Millers and the Krugers and whining Mrs. Harper and that Jesse Minor. Yes, away from that gambler and gunman and brawler! She turned back to her own wagon and mixed dough for biscuits. It could sit while she built up the fire and heated the Dutch oven. There was meat, and the sweet corn she had bought from the woman who each day visited the camp with vegetables, and she'd open a jar of the strawberry preserves. Clem and Larsen would be hungry when they got back with the cattle. . . . Now, where was that cream of tartar?

It was John Larsen—who worried easily—who returned. He was on foot, and he glanced continually from side to side and to the rear as he trotted between the wagons. He was panting from exertion, he was frightened to the point of panic, and he babbled his story so that everyone within five rods could hear it.

"Th' stock, Miss Ann! It's gone, every head of it. A feller out there herdin' said he reckoned it had strayed 'r mebbe some thievin' Injuns had run it off. An' then Clem, he—oh, my Gawd, Miss Ann—"

"What happened? Tell me, quick!"

"Clem, he thought th' feller was lyin'. 'Thievin' Mormons, more like,' he says, an' him an' th' feller had words, an' th' feller said it was easy t' call names when you had a gun on your hip, so Clem took off his belt an' gun an' dropped 'em on th' ground, an' he says, 'Come on, you thievin' Mormon son of a —' you know what he called him, Miss Ann, an' it turned out that for Clem to lay down his gun was just what th' feller wanted. He had a gun himself, under his coat, an' when he got down off his horse an' Clem went for him he pulled it."

"You mean he shot him? Shot Clem?"

"No'm, he didn't shoot him. He belted Clem over th' head with it an' knocked him out colder'n January. An' then he hol-lered, an' I seen some other fellers comin' on horseback, an' so I run here to tell you. Th' feller that hit Clem had his gun pointed at me, but he didn't shoot. He just yelled that they was takin' Clem to jail, an' if I wanted t' see him I'd better do it t'night 'cause first thing in th' mornin' they'd take him out and hang him!"

Ann fainted. The yellow sunlight was suddenly purple beneath her eyelids, and the mountains dipped and curtsied fantastically toward the camp. She tried to reach the chair or to grasp the wagon wheel; but the chair was rocking and leaping like the shifting mountains, and the wheel was spinning crazily out of her grasp. Larsen caught her as she fell.



She wakened in the Miller wagon. Her hair was wet and her wrists tingled, and she could taste the brandy which had been forced between her lips. 'Lige Miller was bending over her holding the bottle, the same which Jesse Minor had bought—*how did they know where Clem had hidden it?*

"She's come to, praise God"—that was Mrs. Miller—"John Larsen, yuh ought t' have y'r pants kicked, blabbin' out a story like that 'thout preparin' her. I c'd hear yuh clear over here . . . jest lay quiet, dearie."

"What will I do?" Ann moaned.

"Lay quiet. It's all right. I don't care whut anybody says, I'll take ye in"—*what could she mean by that?*—"and I'll see that no harm comes to ye. Lay still, dearie."

"I can't." Ann struggled and sat upright. "Clem's in jail, and they're going to hang him. They told Larsen so."

"Now, now, dearie . . . 'Lige, you git on about whut I told ye an' don't stand there gawkin' like a hen with th' pip. Git! Put that bottle down fust."

"I'm goin'. I've done gone!"

"And mind ye come straight back," Sophronia screamed. "I want a man around, even if it's only you!"

"Where is he going?" Ann yielded to the pressure of Mrs. Miller's hand and sank back on the blankets. Her head was swimming, and when she opened her eyes the varnished yellow bows of the wagon wove themselves into crazy geometrical patterns against the background of the stained canvas.

"I sent him on a errant. No, that ain't exactly true, an' ye might 's well hear th' truth. I sent him up t' th' Salt Lake House t' git that feller that helped ye out b'fore, that gamblin' man, Jess Minor."

"You mustn't. I don't want him."

"Mebbe yuh don't want castor ile, either, but there's times when yuh got t' take it. Things 've come to pass where we in th' camp 're scared t' be close to ye—whut with strange men comin' round in th' dead of night an' tellin' John Kruger all th' awful things that'd happen to us if we started f'r Californy an' took you along. There'd been other emigrant trains massacred, they said, an' if we didn't want our throats cut we'd best mind whut they told us. We're scared of 'em—"

"But who are they?" Ann found strength to ask.

"We wish we knew—all of us. They come in th' dark an' put their mouths to a hole in th' wagon sheet an' say whut they come t' say an' then they're gone. Nobody sees 'em, an' they say not even a dog barks. It's skeery. Kruger was goin' to th' authorities with th' whole business—he ain't unfriendly to you, Ann—but his wife wouldn't let him, an' there was plenty t' back her up. That Jesse Minor seems t' throw c'nsiderable weight in these parts. He's helped ye b'fore, and I'm thinkin' he'll help ye ag'in. Here comes 'Lige—he musta flew!"

Miller climbed over the front seat and lifted down a long-barreled rifle which swung in leather thongs from the wagon bows. He was smirking with self-importance.

"Quit grinnin' an' monkeyin' with thet gun an' say some-thin'," his wife snapped. "Did ye see him?"

"I seen him. Sent me back in a kerridge, he did, clear from th' Salt Lake House, an' told me t' put a fresh load in my rifle

an' t' blow th' liver an' lights outa th' first stranger that tried t' bother Miss Carmeny here. Kill 'em first, he says, an' ask 'em their business later. I aim t' do it."

"Is he comin' here, whut did he say when-ye told him, oh my God, why're men such dumm fools?"

"He's comin'." 'Lige finally caught the steel worm in the linen patch and carefully withdrew the bullet. "Later. I couldn't tell him nothin' except whut we'd heard Larsen bellerin' t' Ann here—'bout somebody sayin' Clem was bein' took t' jail an' was t' be hung."

Ann sat up quickly.

"What did he say to that? Please tell me."

"He jest laughed, Miss Ann." Miller inverted the rifle and slapped the butt to loosen the powder charge. "Said that in spite of all th' stories told 'bout Utah Territory y' still had t' go t' considerable trouble 'fore ye c'd git a man a hangin'. Further, he says he didn't think Clem was in jail at all, but he was goin' t' mosey round some an' find out. Then he'll come here."

"He didn't seem worried, then?"

"Worried? Him? He ain't th' worryin' kind, ma'am. He asked me whut Clem was goin' after th' stock for, an' when I told him I hadn't no idee he just says, 'Some crazy notion, I'll bet,' an' that was all."

He flicked off the cap and blew through the nipple, then poured a fresh charge of powder from the horn and drove the patched bullet to its seat with one smooth stroke of the hickory rod.

"Sent me back in a kerridge, he did," he repeated as he pressed a fresh cap into place.

Jesse Minor did not reach the camp until after dark. Mrs. Miller prepared supper, put the children to bed and then dared to cross the thirty feet of space which separated her wagon from Ann's. She urged Ann to put out the candle lantern which hung from the end of the wagon, but the girl shook her head.

"Whoever comes," she said, "will find me waiting."

"An' me!" 'Lige Miller spoke from where he sat in the shadow of the wagon, the long rifle across his knees. He was a part of

the night, invisible, and soundless except for an occasional syrupy *swish* as he spat tobacco juice in the sandy soil.

Minor arrived from the south, the only direction from which he would not reasonably be expected. They heard the regular cadence of the hoofs of a trotting team, then the squeak of a brake and a man's voice.

"Hey, you, whoever you are. No hosses 'r other stock in the camp. Tie up over—" and then Jesse Minor's reply:

"My name's Minor, Jesse Minor, and I've got business in there. Get out of my way—please."

Whatever the guard might have said was drowned by 'Lige Miller's cackling laughter.

"That's him. 'Git outa my way—please!' Ain't he somethin'?"

A light four-wheeled gig swung into the lane and halted by the wagon. The light shone on the horses' long faces and soft bright eyes. Then a white hat moved into the circle of radiance. Minor rubbed the near horse's nose, and the beast nipped playfully at his gloved hand.

"You there, 'Lige?"

"Sure am!"

"Take my team and tie it across the road, will you? There's a couple of halters under the seat, and you can slip the bridles. If that fellow down there wants to know anything, tell him to keep his nose out of what isn't his business."

Minor bowed perfunctorily to Mrs. Miller, then took Ann's hand. She wanted to pull her fingers away, fearful that some vibration would tell him how her fears had vanished with his coming.

"I take it," he said, "that Mrs. Miller knows about what happened this afternoon."

"All that any of us know is what Larsen told us—and he seems to have disappeared."

"Don't worry about him. The man whose first interest is in his own hide usually manages to save it. And just to put your mind at ease, Clem Talbot is not in jail and most certainly won't be hanged tomorrow. Your oxen are gone."

He gestured lightly, fingers opening from half-closed palm, to show how complete was that disappearance.

"Thank you for—for everything. Have you seen Clem, and is he hurt? That's the most important. Then, who took my cattle and why did they do it?"

"One thing at a time." Minor rolled one of his cornhusk cigarettes. "I found Clem in a shack out in the hills toward the mouth of Little Cottonwood. He had a welt across his tough skull, and a chain was padlocked around his waist and to one of the logs in the wall. He'd been taken there to—well, let's say to keep him out of trouble."

"Where is he now?"

"In bed at the Salt Lake House. He wanted to come right on to camp, but I persuaded him to rest until morning. As for your cattle, I'm informed that they have strayed."

"I think you know that isn't the truth. They were stolen."

"Very probably." Minor shrugged. "Cattle have strayed from those pastures before. Most of them have turned up again, but not until after their owners had bought very inferior stock at very high prices and had resumed their journey to California. It was quite a game a few years ago, but I didn't know it was still being played."

"Do you know who took them, Mr. Minor?"

"No—although it wouldn't be too hard to find out. To tell you the truth, Miss Carmeny, I'm less interested in who took your cattle, or who hit Clem Talbot, than I am in who ordered those things to be done."

"Some of them awful Mormons!" Mrs. Miller exclaimed. "I've heard all about 'em. That Brigham Young an' his murderin' Danites—"

"Not at all," Minor snapped. "There may be a Mormon running this show, or the fellow who slugged Clem and ran off the cattle may have been a payer of tithes, but it's not church business. Try to keep the two things separate."

"What two things?"

"The church and the deeds of individuals who might belong

to the church. The right hand usually knows what the left is doing, but not always."

"Suit y'rself," she sniffed, "but I happen to know that them two men that started t' talk t' us at th' cemetery when you interfered with 'em was 'postles—both of 'em."

"I believe they were," admitted Minor placidly.

"What did they want?" Ann interjected. "You didn't explain it the other day."

"They wished to meet you," he smiled. "I've been given to understand that their intentions were entirely honorable—they wished to meet you and then, probably, offer a proposal of marriage."

"Marriage!"

"Quite so." His eyes danced in the lantern light. "The divine ordinance of a plurality of wives tends to make courtships brief. At least four of the young women in the wagon train with which you traveled were married women before sunset of the day they reached Zion. They'd never seen the men before—but only through marriage can a woman hope to attain salvation. It was your immortal soul they were thinking of, Miss Carmeny, not your very mortal dollars."

"Please don't talk about it any more."—*Why did his words seem such cynical mockery of Thomas Medbridge's agony of soul?*—"It's disgusting that men should be like that. They're worse than animals."

"One of the apostles," Minor continued blandly, "has some forty-odd wives according to the latest count. He has been known to refer to them publicly as his 'cows.'"

"Please! And I don't want you to talk about it either, Mrs. Miller. I hate it." She changed the subject abruptly. "I think I should tell you, Mr. Minor, that I sent Clem and Larsen out to the pasture. They were going to bring the cattle in, and we were starting on the California road first thing in the morning."

"Alone?"

"Yes." She told him of Kruger's refusal to accept her in the train, and Minor nodded; then of the second rebuff when she

tried to obtain tickets on either the east- or westbound stages. At that he whistled softly.

"I'm beginning to respect whoever's running this show," he said. "They're rough, but they don't overlook any bets."

"It made me angry," said Ann. "I decided to—to call the bluff"—the gray-blue eyes flickered toward her—"and if anyone tried to stop us to demand that they show warrants and place us under arrest, and then the whole affair really would be in the courts."

"It isn't yet, you know," he interrupted. "I made inquiry, and the man who was here a few nights ago has no more to do with the courts than I have."

"I suspected as much when nothing more came of it."

"But," he added, "maybe you wouldn't have been arrested and wouldn't have been brought back here. Didn't that occur to you too?"

"I don't understand—what would have happened?"

"One of two things. You might have gone on through to California without being interfered with at all, which would have meant that the whole business was a huge bluff and that somebody didn't care to see it through. The other possibility is that they were not bluffing and that something would have happened—to you and to Clem Talbot and to Larsen. Unpleasant for the few minutes it lasted, but it wouldn't have lasted long."

"You mean . . ." her voice sounded far away, strangled.

"I mean just that. What you're thinking. Do you want me to guess at particulars?"

"No, please don't." She buried her face in her hands, struggling to regain control of nerves and voice. He was so calm, so matter of fact. "Unpleasant . . . but it wouldn't have lasted long." When she spoke her voice was shrill.

"But what can I do? I can't just sit here—it's like waiting for lightning to strike. What can I do?"

He did not seem to hear the question. His fingers were busy with another of the twisted cigarettes.

"You're being played with." He touched a match to the

cornhusk and inhaled. "Cat-and-mouse game. It's nothing to laugh about when you look at it from the mouse's viewpoint. Do you really want to go to California, Miss Carmeny?"

"I—all I want is to get away from here. Anywhere, just so I'm away from this cat-and-mouse game, as you call it."

"I think that might be arranged," he said judicially. "You could go and even take some of your gold with you—half of it or maybe even more."

"You mean pay to get away? Pay whom?"

He shrugged.

"Somebody. Maybe two somebodies. I've tried to do a little investigating during these last few days, Miss Carmeny—you might say it was none of my business, but I felt sure that throwing those fellows out of your camp wouldn't prove to be the end of the matter—and it looks as though two fellows got the same idea at the same time and decided to make a try for the gold you had. Neither of 'em likes the idea of my taking a hand in the game. They'd be willing to split the pot with you, I think, if I got out."

"No!" she flared. "I won't do that—I won't! That gold is just as much mine as the clothes I'm wearing, and I won't—"

"Never mind explaining. I didn't think you would."

"I'll get a lawyer tomorrow—I should have done it before—and I'll mail that certificate of deposit away. I'll—"

"You'll defy them. They won't mind, just as long as they've got you here in Great Salt Lake City."

"I won't stay in Great Salt Lake City! Surely, there's some way . . ."

"Maybe. Other folks have been in the same kind of a fix, and some of 'em have gotten away clear."—*Some of them? What did he mean by that?*—"It'd be easier if you knew just who it was you ought to be afraid of. Right now you don't. You're in the woods, on a dark night, and blindfolded to boot. You won't see the trees until you run into them or a cliff until you fall over it. You're a young girl, and you're alone here, and you can't move a step without being seen or heard."

He paused. She swallowed, hard, against the lump that rose in her throat.

"Go on, please. Tell me everything—the worst."

"I've told you that you might be able to get away; that you might start for the coast and get through without any trouble—and again you might not. Let's look at the other side of the slate and say you'd be forced to stay here. Your cattle have disappeared, and you'd find it hard to buy others. You wouldn't be injured, and you wouldn't be insulted; but something would block every move you made. Your friends—the Millers here and the rest of them—will be pulling out within a few days now, and your man Larsen will probably go with them. He's scared to death now. I'd move on, which I think would please some people mightily, and you'd be alone."

"Clem would be here, and he's faithful," she whispered.

"Clem would be here, and he'd be faithful," Minor agreed. "Clem's already had one accident, though. Don't forget that."

"And then what?" she asked through hard-clenched teeth.

"I don't know."

His confession of ignorance was more terrifying than any tale of mysterious and invisible enemies. She felt as though she were trapped in a pit the walls of which were slowly collapsing upon her. His voice was a bell that clanged brazenly and inexorably from some immense distance. She leaped to her feet, half-screaming the question she had asked before.

"But what can I do? What can I do?"

She stood beside him; her hands clutched his shoulders. Behind them Sophronia Miller was whimpering like a child which wakes in a strange room; a high-pitched plaintive wail that told of dread of things unseen. Minor captured Ann's fluttering hands and held them firmly.

"I frightened you. I'm sorry, but this thing is serious, and you're too brave for your own good. There's one thing you can do that will throw them a long way off the trail."

"What is it?"

"You can get married!"

She pulled her hands away, but he quietly regained possession of them. She heard herself laughing shrilly.

"Married? . . . Married!"

"I was never more serious in my life. You're in Utah, and there's no place in the world where marriage makes more difference to a woman. It's as though she disappeared. Once she takes another name she's nothing and her husband's everything in the eyes of the people of Utah—"

"But—"

"Let me finish, then talk all you want to. Being married would help you. All I've got is a suspicion as to who is behind this cat-and-mouse game, but they'd think twice about making any moves if they knew they were dealing with a man."

"It's . . . I can't. Think of something else—you must. Who would I marry? Clem Talbot? Or Thomas Medbridge?"

"Clem I know," he said. "Who's Thomas Medbridge?"

Mrs. Miller answered him.

"He's a young man that was with th' train we come up with on th' Sweetwater," she said. "Seems like a upright an' God-fearin' young man, too, even if he is a Mormon elder."

"Ah. . . ." Minor was watching Ann Carmeny, watching her eyes and the sweet oval of her face and the almost imperceptible trembling of her lips. "Many of them are upright and God-fearing men," he said deliberately, "but marrying Elder Medbridge might only add to your difficulties. You can do better than that, Ann."

Her toe was tapping the ground nervously, and her skirt twitched back and forth with the motion of her knee. She and this man stood alone in the circle of light which fell on his bare head and his face and the white bosom of his linen shirt, but over his shoulder there was darkness. She wanted to turn, to get back to the chair before things began to whirl again . . . but if she turned she'd be looking into more darkness. . . . *I'm alone . . . I'm alone like he said blindfolded in the woods and afraid to walk and more afraid to stand where I am I'm alone I couldn't get married like he said and why should I I couldn't*

marry Clem Talbot not if they killed me he's like an old piece of rawhide that's been in the sun Thomas Medbridge isn't like him he said he loves me said he loves me said he loves me as I love you no knife . . . but he's a Mormon and he wouldn't love me and he wouldn't marry me unless I was a Mormon too and believed in all the things he did everlasting gospel Joseph Smith Brigham Young Twelve Apostles Book of Mormon Latter Day Saints and I don't care what you call it it's just polygamy and it's horrible and besides I don't want to be married . . . who said for me to get married . . .

"Don't try to hold her head up . . ."

That was Jesse Minor talking. He was a gambling man and he'd killed somebody named Snake River Something and now he was holding her in his arms he was strong he lifted her as though she weighed nothing at all and now . . .

"Let your head go forward, Ann."

There he was again . . . she hadn't told him he could address her by her first name a gentleman should not presume . . .

". . . Right down until it touches your knees. That's right. Don't be frightened. You fainted, that's all. Clem Talbot couldn't help you, Ann, and Elder Medbridge wouldn't. You're going to marry me!"

Chapter VII

I

AND THEY WERE MARRIED. . . . Jesse's shouted declaration had been triumphant, but with the exultation of one who perceives, in a sudden flash of inspiration, the solution of a problem which has long perplexed him. Ann had been both frightened and weary, inexpressibly weary. She had accepted Jesse Minor's solution rather than Jesse Minor, seizing it as one buffeted into helplessness by a swift current would seize a floating log. She was still drifting helplessly, but she was supported and would not be swallowed under by the dark waters. If Peter Carmeny had only lived . . . but Peter had not lived. If there were only someone she knew here, someone to whom she could turn . . .

but there was no one, it seemed, except this tall man with the white hat who seemed possessed of strange weapons of his own before which her mysterious enemies fell back. He could get her away from this place and its terrors—and then—and then it would work out somehow.

Jesse had stayed only a short time, only long enough to insist on immediate preparations for a ceremony the next afternoon and to override sharply her objections. The hours between had been accommodating; they had telescoped into seconds when she questioned her conscience as to the wisdom of this course, and where time was necessary they seemed to stretch out indefinitely—as through the discussion with Mrs. Miller as to the clothes she should wear.

"There just isn't time even to think of making a wedding gown, Mrs. Miller, even if I could buy white satin and silk stockings and kid pumps here in Great Salt Lake City, which I doubt. I've got only the one really pretty dress, and I'll have to wear it. This rose-trimmed muslin. It's—"

"Oh, my God, Ann dearie, you can't! It wouldn't be decent. colors like that, an' yore pore dear pa not a week buried. You can't. What would people say?"

Ann laughed, and laughed again, at Sophronia's purse-lipped disapproval of laughter. The leathery woman from the Illinois bottoms disapproved of everything except the actual marriage. That she endorsed heartily. Marriage, she believed, would solve all difficulties for this pale girl, and Jesse Minor could unquestionably care adequately for her. Sophronia, through all her life, had known nothing but grinding poverty. She saw Minor's tailored clothes, the gold chain which crossed the flowered silk vest, the gleaming harness on the spirited team he drove, and she accepted them all for what they were, tangible evidences of wealth. At the same time, there were conventions which should be observed. A daughter need not wear mourning as deep as that prescribed for a widow, but mourning she should wear. Deep black from head to foot, a veil, and no color whatever, not a trace. Not even a line of white ruching at the throat.

"Y' didn't think of that, did y'?" Sophronia sniffed. "Y' didn't think how it w'd look t' people?"

"What people?" Ann asked calmly. "There'll be you and 'Lige and Clem Talbot, and that's all. I don't like black, and I won't—I tell you I won't!—be married in it. I'm marrying a man I don't love and who doesn't love me—"

"Don't take on like that, Ann dearie, please don't. It's awful bad luck t' say things like that, an', b'sides, you'll find y' do love him all right after—well, after. Ther's th' natur' of women."

The words and their implication struck sharply on Ann's ears, but she gave no sign of having heard them.

"And I'm not going to stand up there looking like a starved crow," she went on. "I'm too tall to be pretty, and I'm too pale to be pretty; but I'm going to look as pretty as I can. I'm going to show Mr. Minor and—and these Mormons or whoever it is that has been making all this trouble for me, that I've at least got pretty clothes. I'm going to wear the rose muslin and my Leghorn hat"—Mrs. Miller gasped and shuddered visibly—"and the biggest hoops that have ever been seen in Great Salt Lake City! Maybe I'm being a fool, but I'm going to be a gay one!"

Those swift hours of frenzied preparation had been exciting. One couldn't be moody and worried with one's mouth full of pins and with yards upon yards of white muslin, printed with thousands of pink rosebuds, billowing over one's knees. Then dressing . . . "But I haven't got any stays, Mrs. Miller! I've never even owned stays. It's always been the one thing on which papa laid down orders about what I wore—he declared they were unhealthy and he'd never let me have them." And Sophronia's snorting reply to the effect that what couldn't be cured must perforce be endured. The chemise and the stockings and the hoop-band and the hoops . . . then the three petticoats and over all the dress, fourteen yards around the hem. The carriage which Jesse sent for her waited . . . Jesse had waited, too, on the steps of the 'dobe courthouse, and he had been surprised. He had looked for a somber, black-clad bride and not for a tall smiling girl with a wide hat of yellow straw over smooth brown hair

that shone with bronze lights and with small patent-leather slippers twinkling beneath the rim of a huge, billowing hoop skirt. There were rose velvet ribbons at her throat and about the right basque and as trimming on the short puffy sleeves. Jesse had bowed like an Elizabethan cavalier. Only a plume on his broad hat and a dress sword parting the tails of his long coat were needed to complete the likeness.

"You are beautiful, Ann. I am proud of you."

More than the words, satisfactory though they were, had been the air with which he placed her hand on his arm and walked with her into the dingy building.

"There are a few formalities, Ann—the license, you know. I'd have attended to it except that I didn't know the answers."

A popeyed clerk had asked her questions from behind a waisthigh counter and had put down her answers. Ann Fairchild Carmeny, spinster, born in Painesville in the state of Ohio on April 6, 1841, daughter of Peter Grant Carmeny and Elsie Fairchild, his wife. . . . "And now you, sir." The clerk had been very polite. Jesse Minor . . . "no middle name" . . . bachelor, born in Cincinnati, in the state of Ohio on September 15, 1834. Son of David Brewer Minor—"You've heard of David son of Jesse, Ann; I'm Jesse son of David"—and Margaret Spense Minor, his wife. . . . "That is all. A dollar-fifty, please, Mr. Minor, and Judge Kinkade is waiting for you in the next room."

It was over so swiftly. She had scarcely completed the mental arithmetic which told her that Jesse was twenty-eight years old before they were standing, her hand on his arm, in front of a potbellied little man with a bald head and a big red nose streaked with purple veins and a tuft of red chin whisker that waggled up and down when he talked. He smelled of corn whisky and of cloves chewed to conceal it, and he held a book from which he read quickly. . . . He paused, and Jesse responded with a deep-voiced "I do." Another pause and she, less promptly, echoed Jesse's words. Then Jesse was putting a ring on her finger. . . . "By virtue of the authority vested in me by my appointment as judge of the Federal Court of Utah Territory, I

do now pronounce you man and wife. Whom God has joined t'gether let no man put asunder. Sir, salute your bride!"

They were married. Her eyes and Jesse's met, briefly, and then his lips rested for a moment on her cheek. The judge stepped forward with rather unjudicial haste to claim a similar guerdon and—Ann lowered her head quickly that he might not see her smile—found himself shaking hands with the groom instead. Jesse had taken care of that. He moved as swiftly as a flickering shadow, and as unobtrusively, and put himself between her and the judge. Before he was done with pumping the judge's hand, the Millers and Clem Talbot were a barrier between her and a judicial salute. Of them only Sophronia kissed her, very tearfully.

"I can't help it, Ann dearie. I know everything 'll be all right fr ye now, an' I'm so happy I got t' bawl."

And she kissed Ann again between snuffles and wiped her eyes and her nose on a sodden handkerchief. 'Lige Miller and Clem Talbot were too bashful even to think of such boldness as kisses. They shook her hand and Jesse's, and 'Lige shook hands with the judge. Clem could not take his eyes from the sweeping, dipping cone of her hoop skirt. He watched her dextrous manipulation of the hoops—through the narrow doorway and again as she stepped into the carriage—as one might watch a skilled workman performing a task that called for the utmost care and precision. Jesse joined them at the carriage.

"We're going to Townsend's," he said. "I've ordered dinner for all of us."

It was a triumph for Jesse Minor rather than a dinner. He showed it in every word he uttered, in the set of his broad shoulders, and in the bright laughing eyes which constantly sought hers and asked for her approval. He toasted her—"To the bride!"—so loudly as to be heard by anyone in the hotel, and his voice was as triumphant as a bugle, as insolent as a stallion's shrill challenge. She touched her lips to the glass, wrinkled her nose, then tasted the pale, bubbling liquid amber again. It was good, she decided.

"What is it, Jesse?"

"Champagne, my dear. What a little Frenchman in San Francisco called the soul of France. It's the only wine fit to grace your table today."

"I've heard of it, of course, but I never tasted it before." She sipped again, and Clem Talbot, seeing her with the glass at her lips, raised his own glass and drained it.

"Daggonedest stuff ever I tasted," he informed 'Lige Miller. "'Tain't got no more real kick than well-water, but three swigs of it 'd make ye willin' t' kiss y'r mother-in-law."

He grinned happily at his employer.

"Jesse," Ann whispered, "do you think Clem's getting drunk?"

"I hope so."

"You hope so? Why, Jesse!"

"Most sincerely. I hope that both he and 'Lige get so orey-eyed drunk that they can't hit the ground with their hats in three tries."

"Jesse!"

"Ann!" he mimicked, eyes dancing. "I do hope they get drunk. Could any man have a better excuse? There was nothing I could do, my dear, to make your wedding beautiful, so at least let me give Clem and 'Lige something to remember. I mustn't get drunk myself, so—"

"I should hope not!" she flared, then managed to smile.

"So I have to get drunk by proxy," he concluded.

The dinner was the best that could be obtained in Great Salt Lake City. There was soup—Townsend had first suggested a broth of canned oysters, but Jesse had shaken his head decisively. He was an inlander and distrusted anything which came from the sea. Townsend regretfully substituted chicken broth with rice and vermicelli, and had followed it with roast chicken, garnished with pink slices of baked ham, and a full supply of those vegetables produced in the valley—potatoes, cabbage, beans, parsnips, and sweet corn. For dessert there was green-apple pie, followed by coffee and saucers of tiny white nut-meats, the sweetest which Ann had ever tasted. She thought Jesse was teasing when he told her that they came from a species of pine.

The wine appeared when the soup was removed, and the waiters kept the glasses brimming. By the time the meal ended both Clem and 'Lige were noisy and were bellowing with laughter at their own witticisms. Sophronia giggled impartially at them both. Ann drank only one glass and a few swallows from another. When the waiter filled it once more she let it stand untasted. Jesse drained his glass to every toast which Talbot or Miller suggested, and they suggested many, yet his hand was steady and his voice unthickened. He was gay, but with a controlled gaiety. Ann watched him as he walked first with 'Lige, then with Clem, to the carriage which would take them back to the camp. He swayed only once—when Clem jerked suddenly away from him and declared his intention of dancing a turkey-hop in the middle of Townsend's small lobby. Jesse caught his arm and whispered something which caused Clem to erupt in cackling laughter and to abandon the idea of dancing. The men tucked safely into the back seat, Jesse returned for Mrs. Miller and solemnly agreed with her when she announced that her wavering gait was caused by both her feet having gone sound asleep.

"I'd like to be at that camp tomorrow," he said when he returned to the table. "I gave them another bottle, and they'll empty it, of course, before they sleep. Tomorrow they'll wake up with heads bigger than buckets and a thirst that would stretch from here to New Orleans. First thing they'll want will be water. A pint of water and—presto!—they'll be just as drunk as they are this minute. Champagne works that way."

"Do you think that's fair, Jesse?"

"More than fair. They'll talk about it to the end of their days. I've given them a memory which they'll treasure as a miser treasures his gold. Can't you hear Clem Talbot, when anyone speaks of any big and alcoholic celebration, telling the boaster that he should have been to Jess Minor's wedding in Great Salt Lake City?"

He drained the glass which stood at his place and shook his head to the waiter who leaped forward with a napkin-wrapped bottle.

"You've had as much as either of them yourself, Jesse," she said, "and yet you don't show it."

"Nor will I," he boasted. "I'll wake up in the morning without even a memory—so far as my head is concerned—of to-night's wine. Maybe it's a gift." His shoulders lifted in an unconscious gesture of strength. Then he smiled at her.

"If you have finished, my dear, we can retire."

2

She halted in the doorway, one hand on the unpainted jamb, while Jesse crossed the room and lighted the tallow candles which stood in dirty furrowed hillocks of their own grease on saucers at either end of the pine bureau. The match sputtered in his fingers, and the acrid scent of sulphur bit her nostrils as the flame rose. Jesse held it to one wick after the other, cupping them with his left hand until the tallow softened and the smoky yellow flame rose to wink at its reflection in the streaked mirror. Two straight-backed chairs flanked a washstand on which a huge white pitcher, decorated with pink roses, stood in a chipped basin. A slopwater jar, covered, was visible in the open cupboard of the washstand; the handle of the fourth article of the set, the chamber pot, peeped discreetly but obviously from beneath the huge bed.

Those things registered themselves impersonally on Ann's mind between the lighting of the first candle and the second. She saw them as one sees familiar things revealed by dawn-light creeping through a shuttered window. Her heart felt a quick stab of fear of unknown things. This, then, was marriage. A ceremony of one sort or another, words and smiles and a chaste kiss, and then a shabby room and a big double bed. Married people slept together, of course. She just hadn't happened to think about it because she could scarcely remember ever having slept with anyone in her life. She and Jesse would sleep in that bed, their bodies touching, and—and all those things of which Mrs. Miller had tried so stumblingly to tell her. There had been salacious reminiscence in the emigrant woman's voice; but Ann had brushed aside both advice and information, and the

wagging tongue had subsided. Now Ann's fingers closed more tightly on the door jamb as Jesse threw back the quilt and the uppermost of the unbleached muslin sheets. He lifted pillows and bolster, then replaced them and drew the sheet and quilt back into place.

"No livestock," he said smilingly. "Townsend's proud of his place, and he does his best with it."

She stepped into the room and closed the door behind her. For the first time since she had known this man they were alone. She tugged at the bow under her chin and lifted the wide Leghorn hat from her dark hair. Jesse spoke again.

"It's Townsend's best room," he repeated, "and you'll be comfortable." His hand was on the doorknob, and she scarcely realized that he had stepped past her and avoided the obstacle of her hooped skirt in the narrow space at the foot of the bed. How quickly he moved! No, not quickly. Quickness implies haste, and he was never hasty. It was as though he willed himself to be in a certain place, such as at the door of this room or beside her at the gate of the cemetery, and instantly he was there.

"You—you're going away?" she asked, and blushed.

"Not for very long." Jesse did not blush. "There's a couple of fellows got in late this afternoon from the north—from up in Washington Territory north of Snake River. I was too busy to see them earlier, and I want to talk to them before they're too drunk to tell me about that country up there."

Unsteady footfalls moved down the uncarpeted hall. A latch clicked, and a man cursed as he tugged at a sticking door.

"Just one of Townsend's boarders," Jesse said. "He doesn't sell liquor here—too good a Mormon—so they've got to go down the street to buy it and bring it back inside them. He'll serve it in the dining room, too, so long as somebody else buys it and has it delivered here, which might be an example of Mormon consistency. His boarders won't bother you, Ann. You're Jesse Minor's wife now, and there's not many in Great Salt Lake City who don't know it!"

"I know it." She returned his smile as she saw through his kindly subterfuge. He knew that she was embarrassed, and he

had invented these men whom he had to see in order to give her time to get in bed. "It's all been so sudden, Jesse—I can't even get used to calling you Jesse. I'm not afraid, though, and I'm not going to be afraid—not ever. You don't know me, Jesse, but I'm not a crybaby or a scary-cat. I fainted twice yesterday, and I never fainted before in my life. I wanted you to know that because I'm really ashamed of having fainted."

"Brave words." His fingers touched hers where they rested on the footboard of the bed. "There's nothing to be ashamed of in falling down, Ann, so long as you get up again—and you'll always get up."

"Thank you. You have a way of putting things that—that is very flattering. And, Jesse . . ."

"Yes?"

"It's been sudden, like I said before, but I want to be a good wife to you. I really do."

"You will be. I'm not worrying about that, so don't you." He seemed about to say more but checked himself. "There are two keys. I'll take one of them, and you'd better lock the door after I'm gone—just in case somebody with a skinful of Valley Tan forgets his room number."

He smiled again as he closed the door. For a moment she stood there, staring down at the hand which his fingers had touched and at the wide gold band he had placed on it. *He's gentle. I don't love him—not really love him—and yet I married him. Even if I don't learn to love him I couldn't ever be afraid of him or hate him. I do want to be a good wife to him help me to be a good wife to him Lord because I really don't know anything about being a wife and I want to be a good one so help me please and I'll be very grateful. . . .*

3

The room was at the front of the two-story building, and she drew the shades against the view of passers-by on Main Street, then laid her Leghorn hat on the bureau and put beside it the satin wrist-bag which held her marriage certificate, the lawn handkerchief which had been Mrs. Miller's gift, and the de-

posit certificate from the Wells-Fargo Express Company which acknowledged the receipt of fifteen thousand dollars. A folded newspaper lay between the candles—the *Deseret News*, Great Salt Lake City, U. T., July 22, 1862. She hadn't thought of the date, and a Mormon newspaper had to "remind" her of it! This was her wedding day, and this shabby room was her bridal chamber; this bed, heaped with feather mattresses, the first of many she would share with the man she had married.

She opened the carpetbag which Jesse had placed on one of the straight chairs and found her nightgown, then slowly undressed. The silk petticoats rustled as she pulled them over her head. That rustle had been the only sound in the room as she walked beside Jesse to where the judge stood waiting for them. He'd heard it, even above the crunching of the cloes he was chewing, for his little watery eyes had rested for a moment on her knees, then passed quickly to her white face. She knew she was pale. She had scrubbed her cheeks with her knuckles until they smarted, but it had not helped. A bride should be merry and blushing; but she had been able to achieve neither gaiety nor blushes, nor had Jesse seemed to expect them. He had been kind. However quixotic his motives, he had been kind. She loosened the band which supported the hoops, then pulled the nightgown over her head and from beneath its cloak removed her chemise and the ruffled pantalette-drawers. She drew the pins from her hair, brushed it, and plaited it into two long braids which she tied carefully at the ends. A wagon creaked slowly by the hotel, and a man cursed the oxen as the vehicle lurched in and out of the holes which were dustpits in fair weather and impassable mud in the rains. Men were always cursing—the weather, their animals, or one another. . . . She leaned across the bureau and studied the face in the mirror. Dark hair, lustrous and beautiful because she'd always taken care of it and had brushed it nightly ever since her hands had been large enough to grip the brush; one would call it brown hair, but there were high lights of bronze and copper which at the temples were almost golden. Dark lashes above wide-spaced gray eyes. She wished those eyes were blue. Her mother's eyes had been the

color of violets hiding in long grass, but hers were like Peter Carmeny's, as gray as shadowed snow. Jesse's eyes were gray, too, but their color seemed to change with his moods. They had been deep blue when he had kissed her at the judge's command, but when he lifted that false deputy over his head and sent him crashing to the ground they had been the color of a knife blade. . . . She was too pale; even her lips seemed pallid. She'd be pretty, almost, if she could only win back the color to her cheeks. She scrubbed them with the stiff bristles of her hair-brush, but the stimulated blood retreated as swiftly as it had risen. Jesse would have to take her as he found her, pale and passionless—what had put that word into her thoughts? How did she know what she was? She couldn't. On the Platte she had heard some of the women speaking of a bride who, with her husband, had joined the train at Fort Kearny. "I c'd hear 'em laughin' an' carryin' on till all hours. All them southern wimmen are passionate like that, they say. Well, they'll only be young once." Ann could guess only vaguely at those things which the gossip implied. She had turned away, as she had turned from Mrs. Miller's fruits of experience. People didn't talk about things like passion and—and wedding nights. She was blushing furiously and angrily now. A door slammed below, and footsteps sounded on the stairs. She blew out the candles and leaped quickly into bed and beneath the covers. The steps approached her door, and she heard the jangle of spurs and the scrape of dragging rowels. Jesse did not wear spurs, and the man who wore them was passing down the hall, and she blushed again in the darkness as she realized that she was still wearing her stockings. The flesh of thigh and calf felt cold to her fingers as she drew off the stockings, rolled them, and stuffed them beneath her pillow. She shouldn't be cold. A chill like that was of fear, and she shouldn't—she wouldn't!—be afraid.

She roused at the sound of a key in the door and was surprised that she had been asleep. Jesse's broad hat was silhouetted against the light in the hallway, and for a moment she thought of speaking to him, then, on impulse, closed her eyes and simulated sleep. He stood briefly as though listening to the sound

of her regular breathing, then closed the door and held a match to the candles. She twisted sleepily and watched him through the screen of her lowered lashes. Would he speak to her, she wondered, or would he stoop over the bed and waken her with a kiss as the prince roused the sleeping princess in the fairy story?

Jesse hung his white hat on a nail in the wall and found another nail for his coat. His shirt was next, and she saw that his short-sleeved undershirt fitted him like his own skin, wrinkling with the movement of the muscles in arm and shoulder. He was her husband, and she knew so little of him! Only the curt information he had given the marriage license clerk and that he was a gambler. What would her relatives say if they knew she had married a professional gambler? Should she speak to him, she wondered, and let him know she was awake, or should she close her eyes tightly while he completed his undressing? He didn't seem to be in any hurry to undress. He picked up a worn leather valise that stood beside her larger carpetbag and drew from it a small hammer and some metal implement which he placed on the bureau. What did he want with—his hands moved to his waist, and, suddenly, each hand held a revolver, the guns he had displayed for that brief moment at the camp. They had been in the waistband of his trousers, but she had not seen the motion which grasped the curved ivory butts: at one moment his hands were empty, at the next they held the weapons as though some flexion of his abdominal muscles had tossed them into his fingers. They were Colt revolvers—she knew that much—but different from any she had ever seen in that the barrels had been cut to a two-inch length and the heavy loading rammer removed. One he laid on the bureau, then with hammer and drift drove out the wedge which locked the barrel of the other to the frame. He removed the cylinder and inspected carefully each chamber, prying the cap from one nipple and replacing it with a new one. Then he assembled the weapon and examined the other as thoroughly. He laid them side by side on the bureau, crooked one leg and grasped his boot—then straightened as he heard footsteps on the stairs.

It was a woman, as Ann knew from the staccato tapping of high heels, and she felt her muscles tense as the clicking heels paused outside the door. Then the door was flung open, and Ann sat suddenly upright in bed, drawing the sheet and coverlid about her throat. Jesse did not seem to notice that she had moved. Like her, his eyes were on the door and the woman who stood in the opening.

She was a tall woman, taller by inches than Ann, and strikingly handsome. Her hat was almost as broad as Jesse's, but black and turned up cavalier fashion on one side and with a sweeping ostrich plume held to the crown by a silver brooch set with an amber-colored stone. Jet black hair was piled beneath the hat and confined by a net at the nape of her neck. Her eyes were black, too, widespaced beneath dark brows, her lips full, generous, and as red as holly berries. Her cheeks were red, too, and Ann quivered as she realized that they were painted. A painted woman—so close that her outstretched hand could touch the bed! She glanced quickly at Jesse, but Jesse didn't look scandalized. His lips were smiling, but there wasn't even the shadow of a smile in his eyes.

"Well, Molly," he said quietly, "who got you drunk enough to come up here? This is my wedding night."

"So I was told, and I'm not drunk." She steadied herself with one hand on the jamb and then laughed, deep in her throat. "Not too drunk that I don't know what I'm doing, anyway. So you're married, Jesse?"

Jesse nodded. She threw back her head and laughed again, showing two rows of even white teeth.

"Married! My God, Jesse Minor married! I heard it, and I wouldn't believe it."

"So you thought you'd come to see for yourself. Well, you've seen—and don't wait for me to thank you for coming, Molly."

"I won't." The bold black eyes rested first on Ann in the bed, then turned insolently on Jesse. "By God, you've warmed many a bed in your time, Jesse, and from what I know about you there were mighty few that didn't have a woman in them. How's it going to seem to come back to the same one every night?" He

did not answer nor did she wait for a reply. "I was at Gold Hill, in Nevada, and I heard you were at Salt Lake, and I took the next stage east—just to see you again before you joined up with the Mormons and gave old Brigham Young a race for it. Jesus, what a ride! Better'n five hundred miles with an old peddler sitting across from me; and when I wasn't in his lap he was in mine, and he stunk like a wolf-den. Just to see you, Jesse—and then I was told you'd married an emigrator! Wasn't there any other—"

Ann interrupted her, sharply but coolly.

"I think you've said a little more than enough. Jesse may have earned your insults, but I haven't. You can go now."

Their eyes met and clashed, and the insolent black ones were first to fall.

"I hope you're suited, Jess. God knows you've looked them all over long enough . . . but somebody said she had money."

"I've never pimped, and you know it, Molly. Try something different if you're trying to rowel me—or else get out as you were told to."

"I'm going. . . . There's some things you won't believe till you see them with your own eyes, and this is one of them." She turned with a sharp rustle of silken petticoats. "So long, Jesse."

"So long, Molly." He did not move until the sound of the high heels had died away beyond the foot of the stairs; then he closed the door she had left open. He said, "Bitch," with little emphasis and less venom. Ann's eyes met his as he turned.

"Jesse," she said, nor realized that few wives had not asked the same question, "who was that woman?"

"I guess you heard what I just called her. She's that, mostly. It takes all sorts of people to make a new country like this—she's one of them."

"She's—she's a badwoman, Jesse." It was half statement, half query, and she ran the noun and its adjective together as one word.

"Yes. You could call her that and not miss it by much." Jesse fumbled for his pockets, found none in his undershirt, and

wheeled to the chair where he had hung his yest. He twisted one of his slim cigarettes and lit it at the candle. "Yes, if living by your wits and what God gave you makes a bad woman, Maria Virginia is—"

"Is that her name?"

"Uh-huh. Maria Virginia and any last name that she takes a fancy to. She's mostly known as Molly. She'd cut a throat and not lose a wink of sleep, and she'd give you her last dime and sleep out under a sagebrush. She could stick to a man through hell and high water and then shove a knife under his ribs if he didn't come up to her notion of what a man should be."

"Jesse! She knows you, Jesse. She called you by your name, and she said—well, you know the things she said. You—you've . . ."

If he realized that there was more pain than anger in her voice, he did not show it.

"Yes. Just what you're thinking about. That's a pill you can either swallow or throw out the window, Ann. Maybe you'll understand the whole business better after you've been in this country ten years."

For a space she was silent, hunched in the bed, her hands gripping her knees. She thought of how swiftly she had leaped into that bed at the false alarm of this man's approach, so swiftly that she had not said the prayers which she usually gabbled so dutifully and meaninglessly. *Forgive us our trespasses that we may forgive . . .*

"I'll forgive you, Jesse, and I'll try to forget it. Let's not mention it again, either of us. She tempted you and—"

"Tempted!" He seemed to bulk suddenly to twice his size, merging with the shadow thrown on the wall by the flickering candles. "I'm not asking you to forgive me, Ann, and I'm not taking forgiveness by hiding behind that kind of a screen. Tempted! That was Adam's excuse—the first one in history and the weakest. Why didn't he come out and say that he wanted to eat the damned apple and so he went ahead and ate it and what are you going to do about it? Tempted—say, if Molly

had heard you say that she'd have laughed the glass out of Brother Townsend's windows. Maybe she'd tell you how much tempting . . ."

4

Jesse had first seen Maria Virginia in Steve Whipple's place on Sacramento Street, between Kearny and Montgomery Streets, in San Francisco. Silk-hatted businessmen rubbing shoulders at roulette and crap and poker tables with miners in red shirts and boots soiled with the mud of the Yuba and American. Smoke heavy in the air, and the rattle of glasses on the bar where the girls helped the winners spend. Men standing shoulder to shoulder around the faro table watching the game of Jesse Minor and the stack of gold coins which mounted steadily in front of him. Whipple's games were on the square, and in no gambling game are the odds more evenly divided than in faro—provided only that the player can remember every card of fifty-two that has been played and every one remains in the box under the dealer's hand. Maria Virginia—she called herself Vallejo there and permitted the belief that she was one of the old Spanish family—was in the lookout seat, keeping cases on the game. "The queen wins . . . the seven loses . . . pay the coppered king . . . pay the cat-hop, nine, seven, trey." The dealer tipped the empty box to show that no cards remained, and Jesse Minor shoved back his chair. He took half a dozen gold pieces from the pile in front of him and dropped them in his pocket. His eyes met those of the girl Molly as she cleared her cases.

"Have the rest of it put in a sack and ask Steve to keep it in his safe, will you?" he said to the dealer. "I'll be playing later."

To the spectators it was an utter lack of interest in several thousand dollars in gold coin, but Maria Virginia and the little Frenchman with waxed mustaches who dealt the game saw through the gesture. The piles, for all their seeming disorder, were evenly racked, and the player knew to the last dollar how much money was there.

"I'll attend to it," said Maria Virginia. "What's the name?"

"Minor—spelled with an O—Jesse Minor. Steve will know me."

"*Seguramente, señor.*" She had a few Spanish words and used them occasionally. Her eyes followed the frock-coated figure. Jesse moved through the crowd toward the bar. He paused for a few moments to watch the chuck-a-luck dice tumbling in their cage.

"I'll take this to Steve," she informed the dealer. "Then I'm laying off for a little while. I'll send Alec or Paul over to watch your case."

A few minutes later she edged in beside Jesse at the bar.

"Buying, partner?"

"Sure." He pushed aside the bottle which the bartender placed at her hand and gave her the one from which he had just filled his own glass. He said nothing, but he might as well have shouted his knowledge of the practice by which the girls drank cold tea for whisky, or apple cider charged with soda water for champagne, and remained sober while their entertainers paid for the expensive drinks and got drunk. She filled her glass and raised it.

"Here's more luck. You were sure calling them good, Jesse."

"I was lucky. You keep a clean case—what do you call yourself? If we're drinking together we might as well trade names."

"I'm Molly to most people. My name's Maria Virginia." She gave the words the English pronunciation and then added: "Vallejo."

"It's as good as any other," he smiled. "You needn't worry, Molly, I won't talk Spanish to you."

"You speak Spanish?"

"Some—enough to get along on. I've been in Santa Fe and in Tucson—that's in what they're going to call the Arizona Territory."

She pushed the bottle toward him. He filled his glass, then waited for her to fill hers. They drank again to luck.

"I've heard of Tucson. What's it like down there?"

"*No bueno por nada.* If you've got a notion of going there get over it. Half the roughs and blacklegs that have been run out

of California are down there trying to make money by taking it away from each other. They can do it with a gun quicker and easier than with a deck of cards, which doesn't make for peace and quietness. Only fresh money coming into town is what little the emigrators have—there's some emigration over Kearny's road from Santa Fe— and what the soldiers get on payday. There's some mining, and it might be good mining if you weren't taking a chance every minute of being stuck up like a pincushion with Apache arrows."

"If that's all that's wrongs with the country I'll keep on staying away."

He laughed with her. The bottle passed again, and again he waited for her to drink. After the fourth drink it became a game. He knew his own capacity and was quite willing to bet all he had won that he would be sober when she was maudlin. He might wish to play again at Whipple's—there'd be no better opportunity of proving that they couldn't regain their losses by so ancient a subterfuge as assigning a woman to get him drunk. She was a looker and no mistake—figure like a Greek goddess, too.

"Feel like bucking the tiger?" She tossed her black curls toward the roulette table. "I've got a hunch I could make Steve sorry that he was alive tonight."

"Go ahead." He added a double eagle to the coins that lay on the bar. "When you got a hunch, crowd it."

"Aren't you coming?"

"Nope. I can afford to lose for one, not for two."

She lost interest immediately in further gambling. She drank again, this time without invitation, and immediately refilled her glass.

"You're a lone wolf—is that it?"

"Mostly," he nodded. "It keeps you busy enough playing one man's game out here."

"Do you find the lone-wolf game gets you any place?" Her eyes were brilliant, challenging, nor did they change when he laughed at her. She was as crude as all others of her kind that he'd seen along the Overland, in the Spanish towns of Santa

Fe and Tucson and Los Angeles, and here in Upper California. She'd experimented with liquor, and she'd tried to lure him back to the tables where, half drunk, he'd make foolish bets and give back to the house all that he had won at the faro table. She'd failed, now she'd try the one approach that remained. She ran her hand over his shoulder, then down his arm.

"You're a big fellow, Jess, and you didn't get those muscles from watching a little ball run round a wheel or cards come out of a box. You seem to know what you're after in this country, too, and that's more than most men do." She stirred the coins on the bar with her fingertip. "They're after money. So are you, but you're figuring on money as a stake. We'd make a team, Jesse, you and I."

He laughed again. There it was—the bait that every woman since Eve had thought could never fail. He ran his fingertip over the back of her hand and up her bare arm, and her dark eyes glowed hotly.

"We might at that. When are you through here, Molly?"

"When I put on my hat and walk out. Nobody tells me when to quit."

He noted the lightest possible emphasis on the pronoun. No, he thought, nobody would keep you here when you were playing for a couple of thousand. Would the next step be a drug slipped in a drink or a prearranged holdup? Probably the first. Street holdups weren't popular in San Francisco since Colton and his vigilante organization had made the town too hot for the criminal element.

"You can be getting your hat and cape while I pick up the money I won," he said deliberately. "I've got a room on Montgomery Street. How much?"

"How—" She realized the significance of his question, and her black eyes hardened into smoky diamonds. When she spoke, her voice was a whisper that reached only his ears.

"God damn your soul, Jesse Minor, do you think I'm a Bella Union girl? I don't sell, I give; and I give where I want to and not where I'm told to. You're a tinhorn—and I thought you were a man."

Every word dripped venom, and her fury was intensified rather than lessened by her control. Other women, so insulted, would have screamed and scratched, but those who stood nearest her at the bar did not even turn their heads. Jesse Minor removed his broad hat.

"I apologize, Molly," he said with a rare humility, "and when I say I'm sorry I mean it." He cupped her chin in his hand. She neither struck at his wrist nor withdrew, and he stooped and kissed her on the red lips. "But if you don't want to be taken for a whore you'd better quit playing a whore's game."

For a second she stared at him; then the red lips parted, and she laughed.

"You—you—cursing you won't do any good, will it, Jess? Damn it, we're a lot alike, you and I, and that's why I don't know whether I'm going to love you or cut your throat. Look!"

She touched a jewel—a ball of jade clutched in a dragon's claw—at her breast. She lifted it slowly, and he saw the golden foot taper into a scaled shank that was a hilt and then to a gleaming eight-inch blade scarcely half the width of his finger. She pushed on the ball, and the blade and the golden hilt vanished.

"A Chinaman gave me that," she said. "He went back to China with half a million that he'd taken with coolie labor out of bars that white men thought were worked out. I could've gone with him—he wanted to take me—but I didn't. I used to carry a derringer in a holster strapped to my knee, but he told me that was the first place a man would expect a woman to keep her gun and that if I ever needed it I'd have to stoop to get it. This is different. The sheath is sewed inside my dress; and that blade might look thin, but I can drive it through a silver dollar without turning the point. I could've pushed it through your liver, Jesse, just as easy."

"Why didn't you?"

"I don't know. Let's have another drink."

She tossed the raw liquor down her throat and followed that drink with another. When she lifted her chin, her throat was an

ivory column that swept magnificently into the swelling curve of her breast. There was a smoldering flame in her eyes.

"You've got brains, Jesse," she said abruptly. "Maybe that's what I'm liking about you. You're playing your brains against this country out here. You're a gambler, but your real gamble is that somewhere you're going to find a place where you'll fit in and make something out of yourself."

"Yes. Maybe I hadn't thought of it just that way, but you called it pretty close."

"I could tell. I knew it because it's my game too. Your money's safe with Steve Whipple, Jesse. Wait at the door for me until I get my hat and cape."

5

And now that night of ardency and fire and the fusion of passion and the other nights that followed it were to be excused primly as the weakness of male flesh which yielded too easily to temptation. Jesse chuckled, then bellowed with laughter and slapped his thigh.

"Do you think it's funny, Jesse?"

"Yes, I do—and there's no use telling you why, my dear. You couldn't even begin to understand it, any more than you'd understand why Maria Virginia wouldn't marry me even if I begged her to—which let me tell you right now I never have. I might make a try at explaining it in—oh, in about three months. Maybe then you'll see the joke too."

"I won't—not ever," she said steadily. "Things like that are—I just can't tell you. Why did you marry me, Jesse?"

"You'll have to learn the answer to that too. Every woman does. It's something that nobody—least of all a husband—can tell a woman. When you do know why, Ann, I think you'll be glad."

"You seem very sure of it." She watched him as he rolled another cigarette. "You're not sorry, are you, Jesse—sorry about that woman?"

"About her kicking up a row like that—tonight, of all times? Of course I'm sorry."

"You know I don't mean about her coming here. I mean sorry for what you—what you confessed."

"That? No. The easiest way out would be to tell you 'yes,' but I won't. There's no use starting in with a lie. Hell's bright angels, Ann, don't try to build up a case of infidelity out of ancient history."

His indifference lashed her more than his words. What was it Mrs. Miller had said? "Don't fight 'em. Yo're a sight better off whangin' a man 'longside th' head with a skiller than jawin' at him. Nag a man, an' he jest gits huffy an' sooner 'r later either walks out on you 'r takes a gad r' you. Woman's got one weppin that if she uses it right 'll bring a man down quicker 'n she c'd do it with a gun. All she's got t' do is turn her back on him—'specially in bed. . . ." She'd said that and cackled. Everybody was wrong, the preachers and everyone. There wasn't anything holy or consecrating about marriage. It was something to be joked about, nastily. . . .

"I'm your wife, Jesse, and when I told you I wanted to be a good wife I meant it—every word of it. I thought that you'd tell me you were sorry, but you call it ancient history and say that ancient history isn't any of my business. You laugh about it. Please don't speak, Jesse—I've got to tell you this. I'm your wife, but I don't want you to come near me. I don't want you to kiss me or—or . . ."

He sat there, his legs crossed. One hand held his cigarette, the other rested on the ankle of his calfskin boot. His face was grave, but as she stammered and hesitated one eyebrow rose quizzically.

"Or what the lawyers call consummate the marriage. Is that what you're trying to say?"

"Yes, it is—and I mean it!"

"I take it"—the raised eyebrow was twitching now—"I take it that you've had plenty of time to think it all out?"

"Yes." Her chin on her knees, she looked at him steadily. *He's got to come to me; I won't lower myself by going to him. Oh, Jesse, won't you say just one word? Won't you say "I'm sorry," and then teach me to be your wife and to love you? I*

married you because I was afraid, Jesse, not because I loved you. I'm still afraid, and you're frightening me more and more and more. . . .

He crushed the cigarette into the candlestick, then tugged off his close-fitting boots and stood them side by side against the wall. His back was toward her, but in the mirror she saw his lips twitch beneath the brown curve of his mustache.

"If you've thought it all out and know your own mind, that settles the matter, of course. I imagine that with some women"—he lifted a nightshirt from his valise and then pinched the candlewicks, one after the other, between his fingers. His voice continued from the darkness—"with some women there would have been, first bitter recriminations, then equally bitter tears, and in the end forgiveness. I've known of husbands who have been forgiven and of the price they've paid for it. Much more than it was worth, always." He was undressing as he talked. The window was a gray frame in which she could see him standing, arms upraised, as he pulled the nightgown over his head. "Women love to forgive their husbands—it gives them so much to remind those husbands of afterward."

You want me to say something, but I won't give you the satisfaction. I won't argue with you and—so help me—I'll never-never-never mention that woman Maria Virginia again. You're just waiting for me to mention her, Jesse, and that's why I won't.

The springs creaked as he climbed into the bed beside her. She slipped down under the covers and lay there in the darkness, a darkness as black as the evil things that seemed to be crawling in her mind. She tried to breathe deeply, to relax, but remained as rigid as though Townsend's feather mattresses were snowbanks. The bed quivered, and the laughing Jesse spoke to the darkness.

"By God, this is the funniest part of the whole business."

Chapter VIII

I

SOMEWHERE in the hotel was a clock which struck the hours and quarter-hours with a jangling clang as unmusical as the blow of a spoon on a pan. She heard it strike midnight—which fixed for her with some accuracy the hour of Jesse's return and of Maria Virginia's visit—and then make the slow round to one o'clock and on to the quarter and the half. She found herself listening for the next clanging note, wondering if the clock did not need winding, because it was incredible that fifteen minutes could be so elastic a period—and she waked to see Jesse sitting on the edge of the bed in his nightshirt and smoking one of his Spanish cigarettes.

"Good morning, Ann."

"Good morning, Jesse." *I can be just as cool as you can, Mr. Minor—you'll see.* She turned over, and he dressed while she modestly faced the wall.

"I'll wait for you downstairs," he said, "and I'm hungry enough to eat raw dog. Don't take too long about dressing, will you, Ann?"

The latch clicked behind him. A rebellious thought told her to dawdle and compel him to wait until it pleased her to join him, but she dismissed it as petty and swung her legs over the side of the bed. Jesse would wait, but only for such a time as he thought was sufficient for her to dress. Then he would go on, calmly as always, with his breakfast or whatever other business he might have in mind. Just what did women mean, exactly, when they spoke of training a husband? They'd find it easier to train one of those lean gray wolves of the Platte than a man like Jesse Minor. . . . She decided to wear the gray alpaca with the orange ribbons at the throat and orange braid on the half-hooped skirt. She stood at the bureau, burtoning the snug basque, and saw that the two short revolvers were no longer there. . . . Jesse was waiting in the shabby lobby. He bowed, and she noticed that his hair, if permitted to grow, would fall over

his shoulders in curls like Jenny Lind's.

"Thank you for hurrying, my dear. The smell of bacon frying in the kitchen and of coffee—even Mormon coffee—didn't help to make the time pass quickly."

There were others in the dining room, and she was aware of sudden quiet and of forks poised above plates as she entered on Jesse's arm. There was no smirking, however, nor whispered comments on her appearance, or Jesse's, on the morning after the bridal night. That was because of Jesse, she thought, and she repressed sternly the quick surge of pride she felt in this man she had married without love. They were afraid of him, that was all.

"I've got some things to attend to after breakfast," he said between forkfuls of bacon and fried eggs. "Maybe we can arrange to get away tomorrow."

"Tomorrow—but I can't, Jesse. There are things I have to attend to, too. How about the men—Clem and John Larsen? Shall I pay them off? And there's the wagon and the stock."

"The men have been taken care of. I saw Larsen last night, and he was tickled to death to be paid off. He's going on to California with the train you traveled with. We'll have to give Clem today, at least, to sober up. Then, if he's willing, we'll take him on with us. We'll need somebody to drive your wagon."

"Then my stock—my cattle and Lil, my saddle mare. Why didn't you tell me you got it back, Jesse?"

In her quick interest for the animals she approached friendliness.

"Well . . ." He raised to his lips a spoonful of the mixture served to Gentiles and honored unworthily by the name of coffee. "By gravy, the first camp we make we'll sure drink something different from this swill! . . . Oh, about the stock, Ann. I compromised on it."

"I—I don't understand."

"The cattle hadn't strayed, of course. Neither had Indians run them off. Stories like that are all right for emigrators, but everybody else knows the truth. Plenty of people right here in Salt

Lake City knew where your stock was, and last night I had a talk with a fellow that could probably ride pretty close to where they're corraled. I just dropped a hint to the effect that you were Mrs. Jesse Minor now and that it was just possible your husband might take an interest in cattle that were worth more than a thousand dollars on the market. I hinted just as clear that I might forget the whole affair if one team—two yokes, I mean—and your black mare were in Aleck Tophonce's corral by noon today. They're there now—a fellow was waiting to tell me so when I came downstairs. Somebody must have gotten up long before daylight to bring in the four oxen and your mare. We'll just charge the other four head off."

Womanlike, Ann rejected instantly the thought of compromise.

"But why not all of them? If they were stolen deliberately—"

"Not too loud, please." Jesse was smiling. "You might hurt somebody's feelings. The cattle strayed."

"You just said that plenty of people knew where they were. If they'd bring back Lil and two yoke they could just as well return all of them."

"Yes?" Jesse signaled a waiter and ordered more coffee. "I reckon I'm mighty fond of coffee, Ann; that's why I'm willing to drink so much hot water to get a little. You're new out here, and one thing you've got to learn is to save your shooting until the last. I could've got all your stock back; but the chances are I'd have had to kill somebody to do it, and I wouldn't be much use to you if they killed me or slapped me in jail." Her hand rose quickly to her throat to still the sudden gasp of terror, but Jesse continued unconcernedly: "It's like the story they're never tired of telling about the Old Boss—Brigham Young, that is—back in the early days of the territory when the Indians were making nuisances of themselves around the settlements. Plenty of the people wanted to clean out the whole lot of them; but Brigham was boss, and he said no. 'It's cheaper to feed them than fight them,' he said, and the settlers fed them. Mormons have settled just about every place in this country where there's water enough to make two cornstalks grow, and on the whole

they've had mighty few Indian troubles. Cheaper in the long run to feed them than fight them—think it over."

She was silent for a moment, then shrugged lightly. She'd show him that she, too, could take the easiest way and that she could accept her losses like—like a gambler.

"You're right about it, Jesse—and about this coffee, too. It's just what you called it—swill. I can make better coffee than this in a tin can with nothing more than a few buffalo chips for a fire. Ask Clem Talbot."

"Clem will be in the notion for some strong coffee about noon, I'll bet. I'm going to the corral and then attend to some other odds and ends before seeing Clem. Maybe I'll get him started off ahead of us—no use holding ourselves down to an ox team's gait. If there's anything you need at the stores wait until I get back, and I'll go with you."

"I thought that Jesse Minor's wife would be safe anywhere."

"She would!" Ann heard his teeth click. "She'd be so safe that half the people on the streets of Great Salt Lake City would stare after her. Would she enjoy that if she was alone?"

He rose as he spoke, and bowed. He was one of those rarely found men who could achieve courtliness without exaggeration. She knew that those in the room watched him to the doorway and that their eyes then turned quickly to her.

Jesse returned to the hotel, and their room, shortly after noon. With him was a round-faced, long-nosed man with a red-brown mustache which hid his upper lip and swept across his red cheeks to mingle with closely cropped sidewhiskers.

"We'll be here for a day or two yet," Jesse said. "I'll explain later. Ann, this gentleman is Colonel Patrick Edward Connor, commander of the Third Regiment of California Infantry. Colonel, my wife."

Both men bowed; Jesse gracefully, the soldier with a stiff bending from the hips.

"Your servant, ma'am, and yours to command. I had the pleasure of knowing your husband in California, and there's more pleasure in finding that he's decided to marry and settle down."

His voice, like his name, was as Irish as peat smoke. His eyes, Ann thought, were purple rather than blue. They looked at her unwaveringly, like Jesse's eyes.

"We may talk in front of Mrs. Minor, Jesse?" he asked.

"Quite frankly, sir. We haven't been married long enough to have any secrets from each other." His eyes met Ann's above Connor's red head. He was standing where he had stood last night; the soldier was between the bed and the door, exactly in the spot which Maria Virginia had occupied, and Ann blushed hotly and blushed again when she intercepted Colonel Connor's smile.

"God love ye both," he said. He seemed moved, and his brogue was more pronounced. "Ye've got a good man in Jesse Minor, my dear, and I'm thinking he's luckier than he knows."

"Thank you, Colonel." Ann sat down, carefully manipulating her hoops, on the edge of the bed. Jesse and the soldier occupied the two chairs.

"There's no need of telling you that I'm here incognito, Jesse," said Connor. "I'm looking the place over because the Third, with at least a company of the Second Cavalry, are coming here."

"It's more or less common talk that some troops are coming."

"I know. Matters like that can't be kept secret. We're to guard the mails and to prevent Indian hostilities—a statement that doesn't fool anybody, least of all these divils here. What's their attitude toward the troops, Jesse?"

"You don't have to ask me that."

"I guess I don't. We'll be welcomed with open arms by the Gentiles and maybe with another kind of arms by these damned—saving your presence, ma'am—Mormons. I've never dreamed of such a people, Jesse—black-hearted murderers and traitors and proud of it, all of them!"

"Not all." Jesse shook his head. "Wait until you've been here a couple of months, and you'll see."

"And will I that? I've seen enough, it seems to me, already."

"You were with General Taylor's troops in the war with Mexico, weren't you, Colonel?" Jesse veered suddenly from the immediate subject.

"I was. Old Zack—God rest his soldier's soul." Connor crossed himself piously. "I started with the First Texas Foot Riflemen, a lieutenant, and when mustered out I was a captain in Seefield's Independent Volunteers—and what's that got to do with Great Salt Lake City, I'd like to know?"

"Albert Sidney Johnston was the last man to come into this valley with Gentile troops," Jesse said dreamily. "That was in '58. The Mormons made a monkey out of him—burned the wagon trains and ran off the horses and raised Old Ned generally, and when he did get to the city he let Brigham tell him where he could camp. Brigham said Camp Floyd and Johnston obeyed. He marched forty miles and set up his camp, and Brigham went on doing just as he pleased. There's not much wonder that the Mormons have only contempt for Johnston and, indirectly, for the army and all army men."

"And you're waiting for me to say," interrupted Connor, "that Old Zack would have smashed straight for the center of the line."

"Wouldn't he?" Jesse did not wait for a reply. "Brigham and George Smith and Dan Wells and the rest of the Mormon bosses do a lot of yelling and pulpit-pounding, but they'll knuckle down quick enough if their fingers are slapped."

"I've been hearing"—there was the slightest possible flicker of the deep blue eyes toward Ann—"that you were a bit unpopular around here your own self, Jesse. Have you done any finger slapping, now?"

"A fellow getting around like I do takes things as they come," said Jesse evenly. "We're doing a lot of talking without saying much. What was it you wanted to see me about, Colonel?"

"This—I'm thinkin' your veins run ice water, Jesse. I've got to send a report to the states—to the Adjutant General—and I've no wish to trust the mails going out from this place. I want you to find a trustworthy man and send the letter east by his hand. He can put it in the regular mail at Laramie."

He drew a manila envelope from his pocket, raised the gummed flap to his lips, and then on second thought extracted a paper and laid it in Jesse's hands.

"In that paragraph"—he pointed—"you'll find my opinion. You might read it, Jesse, and tell me if it agrees with your own."

Jesse read and his shoulders shook. He glanced at Connor for permission and then extended the sheet to Ann.

"You might read this, my dear, and learn what Colonel Connor thinks of the brethren here."

Ann's eyes followed the penned lines.

It will be impossible for me to describe what I saw and heard in Salt Lake [she read], so as to make you realize the enormity of Mormonism; suffice it that I found them a community of traitors, murderers, fanatics, and whores. The people publicly rejoice at reverses to our arms and thank God that the American government is gone, as they term it, while their prophet and bishops preach treason from the pulpit. The Federal officers are entirely powerless, and talk in whispers for fear of being overheard by Brigham's spies. Brigham Young rules with despotic sway, and death by assassination is the penalty of disobedience to his commands. I have a difficult and dangerous task before me, and will endeavor to act with prudence and firmness . . .

Ann returned the letter to Connor. She said nothing, and it was the soldier's turn to flush as he restored the folded sheet to the envelope.

"It wasn't intended to be read by a lady," he muttered, then sealed the packet and passed it to Jesse.

"I'm counting on you to see that it gets through, Jesse."

"Rest your mind. In a day, or two days at the most, it will be in the hands of a trustworthy man who is going straight through to Laramie. There are plenty such—guides on the Overland and at least two mail drivers that I know personally and others—who have no love for the Mormons."

"I'd sooner it did not go by a stage driver—but I'll leave it up to you. You've taken a load off my shoulders. Good-by, Jesse, and good luck and me blessin' on you and your lady."

He bowed again to Ann.

"A good man," said Jesse as Connor's boots clattered on the stairs. "I'd like to be around when he marches into the city. The Lion of the Lord will find a curb bit in his mouth—the first he's ever tasted—and behind the curb will be a man who won't waste time with words."

"The Lion of the Lord? Who do you mean?"

"Brigham Young. That's what they call him in the church."

"I remember now. The converts in the wagon train had a song about the Lion of the Lord."

She moved from the bed and its connotations of intimacies and crossed the room to the bureau, and failed to release the tapes of her hoop skirt. In front it still cleared the floor by the scant inch which fashion and modesty dictated; the hoops behind were drawn up well above her knees, revealing her long straight legs, clad to the ankle in cambric pantalettes. She loosened the tapes and turned angrily to face Jesse as the hoops dropped with a clatter. It was on her lips to tell him that a gentleman would have turned his back when a lady inadvertently placed herself in so embarrassing a position, but the words faltered when she saw his laughing eyes. He would turn anything she might say to her own discomfiture, and he would do it quickly and cleverly. She was almost regal as she leaned toward the mirror and tucked a stray lock of hair into place.

"If we're going to drive in your carriage, Jesse, there are a few things at the wagon which I'll want."

"We can drive down this afternoon and get them. Clem—he swears he's never going to drink champagne again in his life, by the way—Clem is going to start first thing in the morning. You'll have to put up with Brother Townsend's for a couple of days longer."

"I thought—"

"For a day or two you'll have to let me do the thinking." The words were gentle, free from even a suggestion of rebuke.

"It really makes no difference. Does your decision to stay longer have anything to do with what Colonel Connor said about hearing that you were unpopular around here?"

"Not much. He heard a dime's worth of gossip and built it up to a dollar. I spoke kind of sharp to a fellow about rounding up those cattle of yours. He might have done some growling afterward."

"It frightened me—the way Colonel Connor spoke. I was afraid that there had been some—some more trouble."

"Not a bit."

"I'm glad, Jesse. We'll be leaving here soon, and I hope that we're not followed by anything that's happened here."

"So do I, my dear. There's a strain about living up to any reputation, even one for unswerving rectitude. I'm looking forward to a very pleasant journey. There are small towns all along the way until we get beyond the Bear River bend, and we should catch up with Talbot before then. If we're delayed he'll wait for us at the Snake River ferry."

"Snake River—then we're not going to California?"

"No." He did not emphasize the word, but it was pontifical in its finality. "We're going north of the Snake to the diggings on Salmon River. That's a new strike, newer than Oro Fino and Fort Boisé. All that country up there is new, and that's the kind of country I've been looking for ever since I came out here. Are you disappointed—about California?"

"No. I'm surprised, I guess, but it doesn't make any difference since father—he was the one whose heart was set on California. Only the other day Clem said that it seemed as though the closer you got to California the less of a place it turned out to be."

Jesse made one of his abrupt changes of the subject.

"You've been in all day—and you look charming. We'll drive to the camp and get those things you want, and afterward we'll walk, if there's time before dark. Otherwise, tomorrow for strolling. Great Salt Lake City deserves to see the new Mrs. Jesse Minor."

Board sidewalks, of varying widths and degrees of repair, paralleled the roadways of Main Street, Temple Street, and of

the State Road—the few blocks immediately south of the Temple Square where the business of the city was concentrated. The crossings were an adventure in stepping from rut to rut or in skirting the rims of deep chuckholes, now filled with tawny-red dust, which marked where teams and wagons had bogged down in the morass to which the streets were converted by every rain. A huge hole in the ground at the eastern end of the square marked the site chosen for the temple which would succeed and supplant those previously erected by the Latter Day Saints at Kirtland and Nauvoo. A dozen men were working lackadaisically on the thick foundations that were already in place. Ann leaned over the low rail and stared into the excavation.

"From the stories we heard crossing the Plains," she said, "I had the idea it was all finished and in use."

"The Mormons encourage those notions—they're good for the converts. It'll be finished some time, though, you can bet your last dollar on that. They've promised it to the Lord, just as they did the one at Nauvoo, and a promise to the Lord is one they'll keep in spite of hell and high water, death and destruction."

"They're a peculiar people," she said thoughtfully. "My father remembered when they lived in Ohio. He always said they were just a poor, deluded people. Then, after we started west, we began hearing stories about them—how awful they were and how the Danites killed people and—"

"I know. I've probably heard all you did and some you missed."

"—And that letter Colonel Connor wrote. Are those things true, Jesse?"

"True as gospel. There's thieving and lying and adultery going on all the time here. Brigham and the high-ups in the church curse the Federal government and prophesy that it will go down to destruction—and yet if you shot a rifle through the window of the Tabernacle over there the chances are ten to one you'd hit a hard-working honest farmer or mechanic that had never done a mean thing in his life and who'd share his

last crust or his last dollar with you. There was a fellow in Los Angeles who'd been with Colonel Frémont in '53 when his outfit nearly died of cold and starvation trying to prove you could cross the mountains and deserts from Santa Fe to the Great Basin in the dead of winter. By good luck and some good management they hit one of the southern settlements. The Mormons took them in and fed them and nursed them back to health—well, you couldn't make that fellow even listen to any story against the Mormons; he'd tell you there wasn't any finer people on the face of the earth. And yet only three or four years after that those same Mormons from the southern settlements joined up in the cold-blooded killing of more than a hundred people in an emigrant train going to California. A few little children were spared, that was all."

"Was that what they call the Mountain Meadows Massacre?"

"Yes. It'll be talked of as long as there is a Mormon Church, I reckon."

The handful of workers in the excavation seemed moving about aimlessly, their labors undirected. She saw one man, for the third time since she had been watching, measure the length and width of a block of granite. Only the lower courses of the walls were of permanent masonry; the upper tiers were of mud-plastered 'dobe bricks which lent a similitude of greater height.

"Does anybody understand them, really understand them, Jesse?"

"The Mormons? Lord love you, no—they don't even understand themselves. How can anybody ever understand people who will flog a thief and kill or brand an adulterous wife and then turn square around and ask God to bless the church leaders when they perpetrate all sorts of outrages. Look at what they did to the Morrisites only last month."

"What was that—I never heard of it."

"Just a little family fight. A fellow named Morris set up in business as a rival prophet and built a settlement and a fort up on the Weber River. He claimed he was the real thing and that Brigham was just a fake because he didn't get revelations

from God every day or two. Morris had a little bunch of people who believed in him, but they've got only Brigham to believe in now. Brigham's going to be boss or know the reason why, and he sent a posse up there to besiege the fort. When Morris and his outfit surrendered, the leader of the posse—a man named Burton—shot Morris and his right-hand man dead in their tracks. It was as cold-blooded a killing as there could be."

"And nothing was done about it?"

"Not a thing. Burton had some sort of a writ that Brigham had hornswoggled Judge Kinney into issuing, and it was all quite legal—Morris was resisting arrest!"

"I think I'm very glad to be getting away from here."

Jesse was about to reply when a passer-by halted and touched his arm. An elderly man, bearded, and with intense burning eyes, he pointed to the cigarette in Jesse's hand.

"A temple to the Lord is being built here," he said sternly. "It is holy ground and should not be profaned by tobacco."

"I beg your pardon." Jesse smiled disarmingly and crushed the cigarette into the soil. "I was thoughtless."

The man glared at him but said nothing more. Jesse withheld his chuckle until the man was out of hearing.

"I should think you'd have slapped him!" Ann exclaimed. "What right had he to tell you—"

"Every right in the world, my dear. This is holy ground, and I certainly profaned it with my vile tobacco. He's a good Mormon, and he would be less hurt by a punch or a bullet than by the sight of cigarette ashes raining down upon the Temple foundations. I hope that before we leave the city you will meet Brother Rice, the Saint in whose home I boarded for several weeks when I first came here. I call him a saint, and he is one—as kindly an old gentleman as you'd find anywhere in the world. He was one of the earliest converts—Joseph Smith himself baptized him and ordained him an elder—and he knows the history of the church and the theology of Mormonism backward and forward. We used to sit up until dawn in some of our arguments. He calls himself weak in the faith because he can't hate Gentiles as passionately as he's supposed to."

He touched her arm, and they walked on, crossing Temple Street and turning eastward past the home of General Daniel H. Wells, commander of the Nauvoo Legion, and the building which housed the church's History Office. On the north side of Temple Street was a long building with a steep roof of many gables. One end, facing on the street, was decorated with the carved wooden figure of a lion, reared on its haunches and staring from wooden eyes over the city to the south.

"The Lion House," said Jesse. "One of the sights of the town—it's where most of Brigham's wives live. Each window marks a room, they say, and each room holds a wife. According to the Gentiles, the Old Boss walks down the hall and makes a chalk mark on the door of the room he plans to favor with a visit. Then the other wives, not so honored, try to rub out the mark and put one like it on their own doors. Polygamy," he added thoughtfully, "has its drawbacks if a tenth of the tales you hear are true."

"How any woman could—" Ann began indignantly, but Jesse interrupted her.

"Later. You're going to be favored, my dear. Here comes the Prophet himself, the Seer and Revelator, the Old Boss, his Serene Concupiscence, Brigham Young. Take a good look at him."

"Oh!" Ann stood a-tiptoe. "Where is he?"

"Not on the roof of the Lion House. Right here, coming toward us. He's the heavy-set man on the inside."

He drew her close to the wall at their right. A small group of men was approaching, but Ann, at Jesse's prompting, had eyes only for one of the two who walked several paces in advance. She saw a heavy-set, rather paunchy man in a suit of well-made dark gray homespun. Sandy hair, neither red nor brown, hung in a sweeping curl to the level of his ears. He was clean-shaven except for a fringe of whisker under the strong, jutting chin. A man with cold gray eyes and a strongly chiselled nose from which deep lines ran to either corner of his thin lips. The mouth was a gash laid straight across his face and as uncompromising as a sword blade. It was impossible to conceive generous words, or tenderness or sympathy, issuing from a mouth like that. Those

lips could order but never plead; they could decree but never temporize.

"That's the Lion of the Lord," Jesse whispered. "President Lincoln might appoint the governors of Utah Territory, but there's the man who has the final word on everything that goes on from Snake River to the Colorado. What do you think of him?"

"He doesn't look much like a proph—" She did not finish the sentence. A man walking some distance behind the group wheeled and approached her. Jesse crowded Ann against the wall as he placed himself between her and the stranger.

"Yew're Jess Minor." The voice was harsh, snarlingly nasal, and the words were a declaration rather than a question. Ann stood on tiptoe and peered over Jesse's shoulder. The stranger was taller than average and was roughly dressed in shabby garments patched at knees and elbows and foxed with dirty buckskin at the cuffs and the edges of the pockets. She had never seen a more evil, more bestial, face. Fanglike yellow teeth showed behind the loose, slobbering lips as he talked.

"I'm Jesse Minor—what's it to you?"

The other stared for a moment.

"Port Rockwell, he's scared of you," he said. "So're others. I ain't. I ain't scared of you 'r any other gambler that ever stripped a crooked card. Don't f'rgit it."

"I won't." Jesse spoke calmly, but the muscles were tense under the coat where Ann's fingers pressed. "What do you call yourself, stranger? It might be I'd want to remember it."

"I'm Boone Helm."

"I'll remember."

That was all. The man faced them for perhaps ten seconds. His eyes were as black as coal, and the wide area of white which showed around them was veined with red. His nose was narrow and hooked like an eagle's beak and was set crookedly on his face. His lips curled in a sneer, then he turned away, half-running with a long wolfish stride. Ann felt the muscles in Jesse's shoulder relax.

"Shall we go on?" he asked. "You might want to see the

Beehive House, where Mrs. Young Number One lives—and over there is the Eagle Gate. The building beyond, with the cupola, is Brigham's private schoolhouse. There are enough little Youngs to fill it."

"Jesse! Who was that man?"

"I don't know. I never saw him in my life."

"He knew you—he called you by name. You must know him."

"Ann!" His fingers closed lightly on her arm. "Let me tell you one thing right now—I won't lie to you. I might tell you that something is none of your business or that you're not to ask questions, but I won't lie. Don't forget it. Now, I'm repeating that I never saw or heard of Mr. Boone Helm—and I don't want to see him or hear of him again."

"Why—no, never mind telling me. I think I know."

"Do you? That man's bad, Ann; he's rotten bad. There are plenty of men they call bad in this mountain country, but they're not like him. They'll lie and they'll rob and they'll kill, but if you're around them long enough you'll find that even the worst of them will stand by a partner when the pinch comes or that he has something else that for the want of a better name you can call a good quality."

He halted at the corner of the State Road and looked back in the direction Helm had taken. No one was in sight except some children who played in the street in front of the Lion House and an elderly man on the steps of the History Office. Jesse's chin was raised; he seemed to be sniffing the air like a hound.

"Not Boone Helm," he said. "There's something inside of me that tells me about men, Ann. Maybe that's why I win most of the time at cards. I can smell a liar or a bluffer same as I can smell a skunk. I know when a man's to be trusted—like Clem Talbot—and I know when he'd knife me if I gave him half a chance. That Helm's a mad dog, and I knew it when he came across the walk. I could have killed him then—and I think I wish I had."

"No, Jesse, no!"

"Yes, Jesse, yes. If a mad dog ran out of that gate yonder, I'd kill him and be praised for it. Boone Helm is worse than any dog or wolf. I know it—but it's too late now."

"We're going away, Jesse. We'll never see him again."

"Yes, that's right. We're going away. I'm a bridegroom—it would never do for me to set out on my wedding journey with blood on my hands. Not even a mad dog's blood."

The strange eagerness that lighted his face faded. He breathed deeply—she could hear the hissing intake and exhalation of that breath—and then he was again the Jesse Minor who had visited the emigrant camp.

"We were speaking of Brigham Young, my dear," he said calmly, "and of your impressions of him."

"Yes, yes," she chattered. She could think only of Helm's bestial face and of Jesse's regret that he had not killed the man. How could he—she pulled herself together with an effort. "I think I said that he didn't look like a prophet."

"He's not. Joe Smith might have been, but Brigham's a more remarkable man than Joe ever was or ever could have been. Any jasper that goes kind of crazy on religion can set himself up as a prophet, but men like the Old Boss don't grow on every bush. The church was broken and demoralized, and the people were scared out of their skins after Joseph Smith was killed. My friend Elder Rice lived in Nauvoo then, and I'm willing to take his word for what happened. Brigham took hold and jerked the people into line, and he made them give up Nauvoo and all they'd built there and move out here to the Salt Lake Valley. Look what he's done! Twenty years ago there weren't half a dozen people in the world, outside of trappers and Indians, who'd even seen the Great Salt Lake. There's a city here now, and there's just one man to thank for it—old Brigham! He holds this people right in the palm of his hand, and when he pops the whip things happen. He's made plenty of mistakes, and he knows it; but he doesn't holler and beat his head against the wall. Not him!"

"I never dreamed that you could admire a man like that, Jesse.

I think he's horrible. He's just deluded these poor people, like the converts that I traveled with from the Little Sandy. Why, they believed—"

"Sure," he interrupted good-naturedly. "Every single woman was promised a husband, and every man was promised forty acres and a cow—something like that, wasn't it? Most of them got what they were promised, too. The girls weren't told that they might have to share that husband with three or four other women, and the men are due to find out that the forty acres will have to be grubbed clear of the sagebrush or that the only way to get water is by breaking their backs at ditch-digging. Brigham saves their souls, but he sure-pop makes them work out their salvation. Oh, he's a thorough-going old rascal, and he'll spend some mighty uncomfortable moments in hell for some of the things he's done or ordered done, but he's competent, by God, and I admire him for it."

"I hope he appreciates your admiration," she snapped. "He'll never have mine—none of them will."

"He'll die some day," Jesse said musingly. "He's past sixty now."

"Sixty!" she exclaimed. "Why, I wouldn't take him to be more than fifty."

"He's sixty-past, just the same. He's just three days younger than Elder Rice, whom I mentioned as spending so many hours expounding the beauties of Mormonism to me and in telling me of the early days of the church. Poor old Rice is bent double with the rheumatiz and complains of every ill to which the flesh is heir. He resents Brother Brigham's excellent health and is inclined to blame his wife for his own misfortunes. She's been steadfast in refusing to permit him to enter polygamy, and now, he says, it's too late to do him any good."

"Do you approve of polygamy, too," she sniffed, "along with your admiration of Brigham?"

Jesse said, "No," and did not amplify the statement. She felt that he was chuckling inwardly at her womanly hostility to so outrageous a relationship. She resented it, yet all the while was enjoying the walk and the sensation of pacing sedately at Jesse's

side, her gloved hand resting on his arm. The excursion, she knew, was undertaken solely to display her to the citizens of Great Salt Lake City. Jesse cared little for her opinion of Mormonism or its metropolis; he wished to enjoy the turning of heads as they passed and the whispered comments which followed after them. *He's proud of me, he really is. Of course, he's proud of himself too. No man who wasn't as vain as a peacock would wear a hat like that or be so particular about his clothes or crowd his feet into those exquisite calfskin boots. He's proud of himself, but he's proud of me too. I'm glad I have a husband who likes to show me off like this, and I'm not shaming him in this dress and bonnet, either. I haven't seen a better-dressed woman in Great Salt Lake City. I'm your wife, Jesse, and I want to prove it to you. Just give me a chance and I will—just say one word, one word will be enough.*

He turned west, back toward Main Street, on First South Street. A man and woman stumbled down the short walk from one of the houses. The man stepped on the woman's skirts and fell sprawling as she jerked them from under her feet. The woman staggered across the sidewalk and clutched for support at the gnawed hitching rail at the roadside.

"Jesse! Hi, Jesse—how's the bridegroom?"

It was Maria Virginia, and she was very drunk. Ann's back stiffened. She stared directly into the woman's eyes and swept past her. There were several people across the street. They had heard Molly's shriek and were looking at the little group with marked interest. Jesse lifted his broad hat.

"Hello, Molly. I'd forgotten it was Pioneer Day—you're sure celebrating it in good style."

Ann's face was rigid. *I won't mention it. I won't. I won't. How dared he insult me by speaking to her? Now, particularly, just when I was— Oh, I won't. I won't. I won't. Not if he begged me on his knees. I won't.*

Chapter IX

I

THE ROAD OUT of Great Salt Lake City led almost directly into the north. There were fields on either hand, planted in corn and wheat and oats and with smaller tracts of beans and garden vegetables. Water was brought from the hills that lay in a long barrier of rounded crests immediately to the eastward. The light buckboard dipped and splashed through the ditches. To the west, beyond the tilled fields, were the salt flats and long stretches of marshland which ran on and on to the Great Salt Lake. Occasionally, as the buckboard topped a rise, Ann saw the placid surface of the inland sea and the rocky peaks of its barren islands. Then, as the road dipped again into the hollows, they rode in the shadow of cottonwoods and in sight of the little homes.

The houses, almost without exception, were of sun-dried 'dobe bricks. There was no real timber nearer than the main range of the Wasatch far to the eastward, and wood was too precious, too difficult to come by, to be used otherwise than for door and window frames and the necessary beams to support the thick roof of puddled mud or—more rarely—of hand-rived cedar shingles. There were sheep on the hillsides and cattle in the fields, and everywhere there were workers. Children four and five years old were pulling weeds in the truck patches; older boys, barefoot and tanned, were herding sheep; men and sun-bonneted women worked side by side in the cornfields where the tasseled stalks were taller than a man's head.

Jesse seemed in no hurry. He remarked once that Clem Talbot was somewhere ahead and that until they reached the intersection of the Hudspeth Cutoff there would be little need for overtaking the ox team and conforming to its slow rate of travel. There were settlements all along the way, and travelers who could pay for accommodations were certain of finding them.

"These folks don't see much cash," he observed. "Show the

color of a dollar, and the family will sleep in the barn and give us the bed—plenty of them would do it anyhow, just out of hospitality. We'll take it easy—after all, this is a honeymoon."

Ann did not answer. There was a neutrality of lowered points rather than of sheathed weapons. "Don't touch me, Jesse," she had cried, and Jesse—with mockery in his eyes—had accepted that condition and its implied challenge. Her cool, friendly courtesy seemed to please him, and he returned it in kind, smile for smile and word for word. Each night was the same. She undressed and went to bed; he came to the room later, extinguished the candle she had left burning, and undressed in the dark. He lay down beside her, said "Good night, Ann," and was instantly asleep. In the morning he dressed and left the room. *I'll show you, Jesse! You think you know women, but they're not all like that drunken Maria Virginia. I won't come to you. You'll have to come to me, and you'll have to come contritely as a husband should. 'Way deep inside of you you're laughing at me all the time. You'll find out that it isn't a laughing matter.*

Her thoughts satisfied her pride and steeled her will, but an impish, merry devil danced always in Jesse's blue eyes.

Here, among the farmers of the little settlements on the strip of fertile land between the hills and the salt sea, Jesse Minor was not known. The men who rested on their hoes or who turned their teams to the side of the road had never heard of a white-hatted gambler who carried two short guns under the lower edge of his flowered silk vest. They nodded gravely to Jesse, and many of them addressed him as "brother."

"Minor is the name, friend," Jesse would respond, and the simple word "friend" seemed invariably to tell them that he was not of their faith but was indeed friendly toward it and them. Always he added: "This is my wife," and the other's eyes would rest briefly on Ann's face and her ribboned bonnet and the ruffled parasol which she carried to shield her face from the sun. When they drove away from Townsend's hotel she had carried a sunbonnet dangling by its strings from her arm; a regular coal scuttle of a sunbonnet with a slightly flaring rim which projected for six inches beyond her face. She had started to put

it on as they passed the hot springs on the northern edge of the city, and Jesse, without a word, had plucked it out of her hands and tossed it behind the seat. It had lain for a moment on top of the tightly lashed roll of bedding, then slipped over the side to the ground.

"Jesse! My bonnet!" she had exclaimed.

"I don't like it," he said. "This isn't an emigrant outfit, and you're not going to look like an emigrant woman with a pipe in her mouth or a wad of snuff under her lip. You're Mrs. Jesse Minor, and you're riding in style with your husband behind as good a team as there is in all of Utah Territory. I don't like those mope-hats!"

An angry retort had risen to her lips but had been carried away by a flood of laughter. Jesse's eyebrows raised.

"Is it funny, Ann, my not wanting to look as though we should have 'Pike's Peak Or Bust' painted on our carriage?"

"Would you rather I slapped you? Some women would, you know, for what you just did. With their clothes and their hats most women think that their opinion, and not any man's, should be final."

"I don't like those mope-hats," he repeated. "Why don't you wear that big wide one you've got?"

"The Leghorn? But that's a pale yellow, Jesse. I couldn't wear a yellow hat with this dress."

"Why not? It'd look all right to me."

Laughter had closed the discussion. The sunbonnet lay a hundred yards behind them in the dusty road and was destined to delight the second wife of Jacob Reeder. Her small son picked it up and carried it proudly to his mother, and she wore it as her best bonnet for three years.

Few of the names of the settlements through which they passed remained in Ann's memory. Jesse, talking to some straw-chewing farmer, would ask, "What do they call this place, friend?" and the reply would be Kaysville or Willard or the Wells Settlement, and would be as speedily forgotten. The villages—and one could scarcely call some of them even villages—were as alike as beads on a string, and one farmer or

teamster seemed exactly like all the others, and Jesse's unhurried conversation with one might have served with any of the others.

Gradually she began to perceive a certain method in those idle questions. His interest in the state of the crops, the health and progress of the community, were merely introductory to less casual questions about the mountain country to the eastward. Were any settlements being established on the creeks which drained to the Weber River or the Bear? Did the Indians show any hostility toward the Saints or the trappers who camped in the hills? There was still very fair trapping in the mountains, Jesse had been given to understand, and men getting around like trappers did occasionally find placer bars which were worth panning for gold. Always, with wide detours of circumlocution and speculation, the talk led to the mineral deposits and to what prospecting, if any, had been done. It was not until the third day of their leisurely journey, as they approached Ogden City, that she spoke to him of the matter.

"Are you looking for gold mines, Jesse? You speak of gold and prospecting to everyone you talk to."

"I'm looking for something," he said slowly. "I've been looking for close to five years—looking and hoping. Maybe it will turn out to be a gold mine that I was looking for all the time."

She glanced at him quickly. His hat was pushed back on his head, and he seemed profoundly interested in the breeching buckles on the near horse's harness.

"Just what are you talking about, Jesse? It certainly seemed to me that you were interested in gold."

"Maybe I am, but I'm not—well, avaricious. That isn't exactly the word I want, but it will have to do. All this western country has gone crazy about gold. The fellows who got to California too late for the bonanza days in the Sierras started right out looking for other mountains with streams that ran over golden sands. It was all they could think of. The miners threw away hundreds of thousands of dollars in silver at the Comstock Lode—just spaded it out with the tailings because all they had eyes for was something that was yellow and heavy. Gold plays

out quick—at least all the gold camps I've seen have been mighty short-lived. I'm looking for something that will last longer."

"And what would it be, Jesse?"

"I don't know. I wish I did. There are other metals—lead and copper and iron and maybe tin or nickel—that will last longer than gold and make a man just as rich. It might be one of them or it might be farming or stockraising. I'll know it when I run into it—and meanwhile I'm looking."

"And you think these Mormon farmers can help you. Is that it?"

"Not exactly. I like to talk to them, believe it or not. I like to listen to what the other fellow has to say and get his point of view on things." She was to remember that statement in after years, remember the stained rock walls of the Weber Cañon and the sound of Jesse's voice as he gave indefinite and half-formed expression to an interest in his fellows which was destined to develop into political activity and to carry him to the governor's chair and to Washington as senator from a state which was yet unborn.

"These Mormons get around," he went on. "They run their sheep in the mountains, and they cut timber, and they trade with the Indians for buckskins or anything else the Indians have to offer. There's many a good Latter Day brother who's taking care of a possible rainy day with six or eight ounces of dust that he's picked up a little at a time from the Indians. A hatful of sugar for a handful of gold—that's a good swap for both parties. They'd like to find lead, the Mormons would, and they'd like mightily to find iron out here. The fellow who could take hold of some prospect like that would be a big man in a brand-new country."

He was prophesying more truly than ever did Joseph Smith, but neither he nor Ann recognized that prescience. At the moment he was merely talking on a man's one inexhaustible subject, himself, and his wife listened. The horses' gait dropped to a walk, and Jesse let the reins hang loosely over their backs.

"I've done plenty of looking around—does it interest you, Ann?"

"Of course it does. Didn't it ever occur to you, Jesse, that we really don't know a thing about each other—either one of us?"

"That's right. Maybe we're ahead of the game starting from scratch that way. I wonder what it would be like to marry a girl that you'd grown up with and had taken to church sociables and had sat on her front porch about eight nights a week? I'll never find out, either."

He chuckled, then picked up the story of his looking around where he had dropped it.

"I was pretty close to being a grown man when the big rush to California started, and I was crazy to go—like all kids. I didn't, though. My dad told me that if I even started he'd follow me and whip me clear back home, and I believed him. It wasn't until '57—five years ago—that I got started by telling him that I was of age and had five hundred dollars of my own and that he hadn't better try to stop me. That was the year of what they call Johnston's War out here, and when we got to Laramie we were told that getting any further on the Overland route was impossible—Lot Smith and his guerillas had the roads closed tighter than tight. I joined up with two other fellows, both as set on getting to California as I was, and we headed south along the Front Range of the Rockies to Taos and Santa Fe. There wasn't any Colorado Territory then or any Denver City or the other towns that have sprung up on the South Platte and the Arkansas; nothing but the big mountains over to the west, and Indians that kept us looking lively if we wanted to save our hair, and more buffalo and antelope and deer than a hundred men could count. We lived high when we weren't running faster than the antelope to keep two jumps ahead of a bunch of Arapahos.

"We stuck around New Mexico for a while. It was different from anything I'd ever seen, but it wasn't what I was looking for. I didn't know what I was looking for, but New Mexico wasn't it, so I went on toward California over what they call

Kearny's Road—over to the Mimbres and the Gila and then down to the pueblo of Tucson and to the Pima villages and then down the Gila again to the Yuma crossing of the Colorado and over the desert and mountains to Los Angeles. My pocketbook was flatter than a cigarette paper when I got there, but I'd seen a heap of country even if none of it did suit me."

"You didn't make your living then by—by the way you do now?" Ann interrupted.

"Gambling? Why not say it, my dear? No, I didn't. I was forced into it by circumstances—the circumstances of an empty belly and an empty purse. One of my partners knew something of poker and also had a little money. He shared both his knowledge and his possessions with me, and we went out to the military camp near San Fernando where the soldiers had just had a payday. We made a cleanup!"

"But suppose you'd lost?"

"Then we might have gone in for robbing stages, who knows?" He shrugged lightly. "The line between an honest man and a criminal is easy to step over in this country. Today's thief is tomorrow's millionaire, and vice versa. They tell in California of the fellow hanged at Georgetown who—by God!"

He broke off in an oath and slapped his thigh so loudly that the horses leaped in the traces.

"Jesse! What on earth—" Ann clutched at her bonnet.

"Georgetown. Helm. It just came to me."

"What came to you? What on earth are you talking about?"

"Excuse me—I'll explain. You remember the ugly customer who came up to us on Temple Street and said his name was Boone Helm?"

"I'll never forget it."

"Well, it just came to me all of a sudden that I'd heard the name before, and where I'd heard it. A couple of years ago I was in Coloma, which was petering out as a mining town even then, and a fellow there told me of five brothers named Helm who had ruled the roost in Georgetown—that was what brought it all back to me—which is a little town on top of the ridge. There used to be rich diggings around there, and Georgetown

was a rough, tough camp. These Helm brothers were right in the lead when there was any vigilante work to be done."

"What is vigilante work, Jesse."

"I forget how very green you are. Briefly, it's hanging—taking a man to the nearest tree and letting him stand on nothing and look up a rope in expiation of some crime which he has presumably committed. The Helms were strong believers in law and order, in a short rope after a shorter trial, until it was found out that they were hanging men for crimes they themselves had committed—it being easy to point to a corpse and say, 'There's the guilty party.'"

"How horrible!"

"So the respectable element among the miners thought—and there's always a respectable element in every camp, no matter how tough its reputation might be, and when they're roused they never let up. The Helms got away just a jump and a squeak ahead of the rope the miners had for them. I'll gamble every dollar I own or hope to own that Boone Helm is one of that gang."

"I believe you—he looked capable of anything."

"He is—as I think I told you when we made his acquaintance."

"You were telling me, Jesse, about when you first reached California. Please go on. I'm interested."

"It will have to wait, I'm afraid. This is Ogden City now. I was told to inquire for Bishop Bowen about lodging for the night."

2

Ogden City was one of two places which remained permanently identified in Ann Minor's memories of the journey northward. The other was the crowded camp at the intersection of the Hudspeth Cutoff where the California road branched to the westward and the trail to Snake River and Fort Hall led north toward the pillared ravine of Portneuf Cañon. Ogden City and the three-fingered man and her own swift pride in Jesse Minor; the camp near Sheep Rock where they overtook

Clem Talbot and found the red-bearded emigrant and, instead of pride, something that was closely akin to loathing.

The three-fingered man came from the direction of Bishop Bowen's corral and stood at the gate while Jesse talked with the bishop and made arrangements for their accommodations. It was the missing finger which Ann first noticed—the ring finger lacking on the left hand which he rubbed over his stubby chin—and he remained in her memory by that identification. He was nondescript otherwise, neither tall nor short, slim nor fat, young nor old. Afterward, though she tried, she could not recall the color of his eyes or any distinctive feature except that his jaws were covered with a week's growth of beard. There was not even a name to identify him, for the bishop made no introductions and when speaking to the stranger called him only "brother." He was merely the three-fingered man who stood by the gate while Jesse and the bishop unloaded some of the baggage from the buckboard, who followed them to the barn when they put up the horses, and who sat opposite her at the early supper which Mrs. Bowen served. A silent man. His conversation seemed limited to "yes, brother," and "thank you, brother," and "I'll thank you for a little more of the beef, sister." *I'm getting used to this everlasting brother and sister, I guess. It doesn't seem silly any more.* Once he stood and reached across the table rather than ask Ann for the bread. His coat opened, and she saw the buckle of a wide belt and a holstered revolver. That signified nothing; every other man one met on the road was armed in this country. The two cut-down Colts were always underneath Jesse's vest, and he slept with them within easy reach of his hand.

Many of the homes at which they had stopped were polygamous households, but at Bishop Bowen's only one wife was in evidence, and she prepared and served unassisted the substantial meal. Afterward Ann helped her with the dishes and to set the table again. The men sat on benches behind the house, and the two women, as they worked, could hear the rumbling voices. Once, Mrs. Bowen sniffed as a puff of wind carried the odor of Jesse's cigarette into the kitchen.

"I was up in that country north of the Snake for three years," the bishop said. "From '55 to early in '58. We built Fort Limhi on a fork of Salmon River but abandoned it. The Indians were too much for us, and we'd all have been massacred if Brother Brigham hadn't sent troops from Great Salt Lake City. I've never been able to think kindly of Indians since—they repay kindness with thievery and fair dealing with arrows."

"Kill a few of 'em." The three-fingered man seemed to have found his voice. "Kill the first red thief that even lays a hand on anything—then the rest of them know you're not to be trifled with." His voice was flat and monotonic, as colorless as the man himself. Jesse and the bishop replied together.

"That is not the point of view of a Christian, especially of a Latter Day Saint," said the bishop. Jesse was more practical. "Indians," he remarked dryly, "have been known to make considerable trouble over a killing."

"Let 'em make it—all they want," said the man stubbornly. "Get the jump on 'em and keep it. Injuns can't shoot. I never saw one yet that could hit the side of a barn at twenty rods. They respect a man that can shoot, and they let him alone. Have you got a gun, stranger?"

What an odd question, thought Ann. Talking about how Indians could shoot and then suddenly asking Jesse if he had a gun. Jesse's reply was peculiar, too.

"Yes," he said, "I've got a gun," and then he paused an instant before adding deliberately: "stranger."

Ann stepped around the table on which the dishpan stood and looked between the curtains which fluttered at the open window. Jesse was standing, and he'd unbuttoned his coat and revealed a belt which slanted across his hips and supported the holster of a heavy, long-barreled revolver which hung against his right thigh. *When did he get that? I've never seen that big pistol before, and why is he wearing it now?* Something brushed her elbow, and she turned and saw Mrs. Bowen.

"Who is that man?" Ann asked. The woman's plump face was expressionless.

"I don't know him. He came yesterday—travelin' through,

same 's you folks." She stood at Ann's side, watching over the younger woman's shoulder, and listening.

"A Injun," said the three-fingered man, "couldn't hit that privy yonder, less'n a hundred feet off. I c'd put two bullets out of five through the knothole in the door, and I'll bet you on it."

The bishop voiced a protest.

"That's my privy, brother, and I don't want it shot full of holes."

"Put up a mark, then," demanded Three-fingers. "Put up something 'bout the size of a Injun's head down there between the privy and the chicken house. I'll show you what you should've done up at Limhi. I'll show you some real shooting, and I'm willing to bet good hard money that neither of you can beat it."

The bishop could choose between erecting a target and having his backhouse used for one. He trudged to the woodpile, picked up a short end of eight-inch plank, and pointed it with a few blows of the ax, then drove it into the ground at the spot Three-fingers had indicated. A daub of white paint, about the size of a man's hand, was on the side facing the two men. Neither of them spoke while the bishop was on his errand. Three-fingers stood with his thumb hooked in his gunbelt and watched Bowen; Jesse also remained standing, to the left of the other man and a long pace to the rear, and seemed interested only in the brown slopes of the hills which flanked the Weber River. A hawk pivoted and dipped in the blue above the hills, and the sunlight flashed from the white undersurface of its wings. Jesse's eyes followed the bird's wheeling flight.

"What on earth," Ann began, "are they—"

"Women are better off if they leave man's business to men," the bishop's wife said, then repeated her words of a few minutes before. "I don't know that man. Neither of us ever laid eyes on him before yesterday."

The bishop straightened the board with a final tap of the ax and returned to where the others stood.

"There's as good a target as you could ask for if you're set on doing some shooting," he said. Three-fingers nodded.

"A fair mark," he agreed. "A Injun's face, from mouth to hair, would be just about the size of that spot of paint. What do you say, stranger? I've got ten dollars that says I can put five shots into that board and they'll measure two inches less than any five you can shoot."

"You mean string measurement?" asked Jesse mildly.

"Any way you want. You can stick a peg in each hole and run a string around the five of them, or you can measure across the two widest shots."

"One's as fair as the other, but measuring across the two widest shots is easier. Ten dollars won't make me or break me. Go ahead and take your five shots."

"You first."

"Oh—so that's it." Jesse was smiling.

"So that's what? What d'you mean?"

"You want me to take first to give you something to shoot at— isn't that what you're after?"

"Sure. Why not? I'm the one that's making the proposition."

Jesse's thumb and forefinger dipped into the watchpocket of his trousers and extracted a coin.

"We'll flip," he said. "Heads I shoot first, tails you do—that's fair enough, isn't it, bishop?"

"Seems so t' me." Bowen looked vaguely uncomfortable.

"Let her ride, then." Three-fingers bowed to a majority decision. "Heads for you and tails for me."

The coin spun from Jesse's thumb and fell to the ground.

"Heads," announced Three-fingers. "Take your shots."

"Heads she lies." Jesse returned the coin to his pocket and faced the target. He drew the big revolver and cocked it as the muzzle pointed to the sky, then dropped the muzzle and fired without any apparent pause for aiming as it reached the horizontal. Splinters flew from the board as the heavy bullet smashed through, and a black hole showed squarely in the middle of the smear of paint.

"One," announced the three-fingered man.

"I can count 'em," Jesse admonished him. The muzzle of the Colt rose once more. Again it dropped, and again the gun roared

and belched gray-white smoke. A second hole appeared beside the first. Again. And again. There were four holes in the board now, and all would have cut within the circumference of a silver dollar. Bishop Bowen pursed his lips in amazement. That would have been better than good shooting with a rifle; with a handgun it was little short of miraculous. The tall white-hatted stranger took it so easy, too. . . .

"One more," said Three-fingers curtly. He seemed unimpressed by Jesse's marksmanship. He was standing some ten feet to one side; now he moved a pace to the rear, and his hand dropped casually to the butt of his own weapon.

"Four and one makes five, and five empties the pillbox," said Jesse. He raised the Colt and fired his last shot with the same unhurried ease of those which had preceded it, but almost as the smoke leaped from the muzzle he let the now-useless weapon fall to the ground and whirled to face the three-fingered man. His hands flickered in an eye-baffling motion of amazing speed and then halted rigidly at the level of his waist, each gripping one of the stubby ivory-handled revolvers which had been hidden beneath his vest. His thumbs were on the hammers, the muzzles were trained on the three-fingered man, who held his own weapon half drawn from its holster. Each man was as rigid as though cast in bronze.

"My God!" said Bowen hoarsely. "Oh—oh, my God! There's killing . . ."

Three-fingers moistened his lips with his tongue. Jesse Minor laughed.

"You're mistaken, bishop," he said. "Our friend here was just getting set to take his string of shots. There'll be no killing unless he wants it—you understand that, don't you, stranger?"

The eyes of the two met. Three-fingers' were desperate; Jesse's challenging.

"Sure," said Three-fingers. "I understand all right. I was just getting set to take my shots, that's all. Maybe you misunderstood. . . ."

He released his grip, and the gun slipped back into its scabbard. He straightened slowly from his crouch.

"Maybe I misunderstood." Jesse's slow repetition of the man's words showed the extent of his misunderstanding. "Put up another target, will you, bishop? Any piece of board will do."

The bishop, his lips moving with inaudible words, trotted again to the woodpile. Ann could feel Mrs. Bowen's breath puffing against the back of her neck. *That man was going to kill Jesse. He was all ready. He knew Jesse's gun was empty, and he was drawing his own. But why? Why should he want to kill Jesse? Oh, dear God, is that sort of thing going to follow us everywhere? Jesse knew it and was just playing with him. I don't think he knows what it is to be afraid. I stood here and watched it all, and I didn't faint. I must tell Jesse that I saw everything and didn't faint. . . .*

"There's your target," Jesse remarked as the bishop returned. "First, how many loads have you got in your gun?"

"Five," the man muttered. "I carry the hammer on an empty, same as you."

"You noticed that? There was one thing you missed, though."

"Them other guns!"

"No. What I was thinking of was that there were two heads and no tails on that half dollar I flipped. You missed that. A jeweler in San Francisco made it for me—it's handy sometimes to know just how a coin will fall, and you were tipping your hand so strongly that I wanted to see what kind of play you were figuring. Now stand up there and take your string of shots—five of them—and after the last one cock your gun again and pull the trigger. I want to hear it snap on an empty. Shoot, stranger!"

The desperate, goaded Three-fingers gave a pathetic exhibition. Only two of his five shots struck the board, and of those one merely cut a splintered groove across one side. After the fifth shot he obediently snapped his weapon as Jesse had ordered. The hammer clicked on an unloaded chamber. The bishop started to retrieve the target but halted at a word from Jesse.

"Just a minute. I want to show our friend something. Do you hail from Ogden City, stranger?"

Simultaneously, Three-fingers and the bishop said, "No."

"Which way are you heading?" Jesse asked.

"North—Bear River."

"Did you ever hear of me—Jesse Minor?"

"No." The man faced him sullenly.

"Which is a lie, and you know it. I don't want to hear of your riding north, stranger. I'm going that way myself, and I'm particular about the company I might have to keep. You'd better not stay in Ogden, either. Pick some other road, and in case you're asked about Jesse Minor you can tell them of this!"

He turned as he spoke, and again that smooth, swift motion produced one of the short guns. He fired from the level of his waist, and the six shots followed so swiftly one upon the other that the reports seemed one continuous crashing roar.

"I carry these guns with all six loaded," Jesse observed. "Go get the board, bishop."

The piece of plank was eight inches wide and measured a foot above the ground into which it had been driven. All six of the shots had struck it, well in from the edge. Had the board been a man's body its owner would have been blasted into eternity as though by a lightning bolt.

"That closes the performance," said Jesse grimly. "I'm not given to showing off like that, but some folks seem to need an object lesson. I'm getting tired of being bothered and of having my wife bothered. I'm drawing a line, and the next fellow who steps over it is going to be killed before his foot can touch the ground—you can tell that to anybody who might be interested. Now get your horse and get out of here. First, though, I'll trouble you for the ten dollars you were so anxious to bet."

The man, without speaking, extended a gold piece.

"Take it, bishop," said Jesse. "Use it any way you want to in church charities."

Bowen pocketed the coin. Three-fingers walked around the house toward the barn and a few minutes afterward rode down the short lane and turned westward on the road to Great Salt Lake City. Man and horse were a black silhouette against the

disc of the sun as it dropped, dimmed by the haze from the lake, behind the distant hills.

"I think, bishop," Jesse drawled, "that he won't be riding this way again soon. Could I trouble Mrs. Bowen for a pint or so of boiling water? I've got a couple of guns to clean."

"I'll have it for you in a jiffy," Bowen was eager to oblige. "It'll be dark in no time, though; better come inside and clean 'em on the kitchen table." He was still holding the board into which Jesse had poured the six shots from the short gun. "You don't mind if I keep this here, do you?" he asked. "I've seen shooting all my life, but I've never seen anything like that—never! Old Port Rockwell himself couldn't beat it."

"You know Porter, then?" Jesse laughed.

"I've been a member of the church for close on thirty years. I was with the Saints at Kirtland and in Missouri and at Nauvoo, and I've been here since '47. I know Porter Rockwell."

"So do I. I love the old rascal," said Jesse. The bishop gasped.

"First time I ever heard a Gentile speak of loving Port Rockwell," he exclaimed. "There's a plenty in the church that wouldn't say that."

"But I do. He's an old scoundrel, and if he'd received his just deserts he'd have been hanged years ago; but he's a judge of good horseflesh and of good liquor and, according to his own peculiar lights, is honest. I saw a good deal of him, one way and another, while I was in Great Salt Lake City. Since you mentioned it, bishop, he can't beat that kind of shooting—he's tried!"

3

"But, Jesse, who *was* the man?" Ann succeeded in keeping any emotion save that of active curiosity from her voice. She was in bed, and Jesse—as in Townsend's hotel on their wedding night—sat in a straight chair by the bureau and inspected the percussion caps which covered the nipples on his revolvers. There had been no opportunity to question him before about the three-fingered man. She and Mrs. Bowen had retired to the front porch of the house, and the two men, joining them there

after Jesse had cleaned and reloaded his guns, had dismissed from their minds and their speech all reference to the shooting match and its sinister implications. Bowen, with an occasional question from Jesse, told of the short-lived mission at Fort Limhi and of the difficulties with the "Lamanites" there—the Indians whom the missionaries sought to bring to salvation through conversion and baptism.

"Anything we did was wrong," he said. "We fed so many Indians that we came close to starving ourselves, but if we fed a Bannack the Blackfeet and the Nez Percés were on us for taking care of their enemies, and if we gave some Blackfeet shelter in the fort overnight we'd get the Bannacks angry. The Blackfeet are the worst."

"They've had that reputation for more than thirty years," Jesse agreed, "but people are moving into that country now. Gold's been found, you know."

"I've heard of it. There was talk of gold at Fort Limhi, but it began and ended in talk. None of us looked for it. There was one Indian up there—a Bannack, I think—who wore a bracelet made of copper."

"Copper!" Jesse did not often interrupt so sharply. He was like a dog which, dozing before the fire, leaps suddenly to face the doorway and the sound of a stranger's step.

"It was a wide bracelet and as green as grass. It looked like copper to me, and Brother Kelly, who seemed to know something about such things, said he was sure it was copper. The Indian said that it came from somewhere east of the mountains."

"There's lots of country east of the mountains—room enough for copper and plenty of other things." Jesse's sharp interest abated as quickly as it had risen. Shortly afterward the bishop and his wife retired. Ann saw them trudging toward the barn. Mrs. Bowen carried a lantern, and the bishop was burdened with a huge roll of bedding. Their shadows went before them, bobbing in the lantern light. They would sleep in the barn, the bedding spread on the fragrant hay; and she and Jesse would

occupy their bed, and they would not complain. None of these people complained, and they seemed almost shamefaced when they accepted money in return for their hospitality. In the morning they would be interested only in how their guests rested in the bed so willingly given them.

"These are the real Mormons," Jesse had said. "Don't judge them by some you find in Great Salt Lake City."

A dog barked, and the bark changed to ecstatic yelps at the sound of the bishop's voice. Then the door of the barn slammed, and she and Jesse were alone with the constraint which she felt each night when their hosts left them.

"I'll light the candle for you." Always he notified her in words like those that she would be alone for a space, that she would have time to undress and get beneath the covers and turn her face modestly to the wall before he came. Tonight it was the same, but when he slipped the ivory-handled guns from their holsters she sat up in bed and drew the quilts about her chest.

"I wanted to tell you, Jesse," she said, "that I was standing right by the window after supper—I was helping Mrs. Bowen with the dishes—and I saw and heard everything. Who was that man?"

"I don't know, Ann." He tilted one of the guns so that the candle light fell across the gleaming head of a cap. "Bowen didn't know him either. He said, and I believe him, that the fellow just said to call him Brother Alvin."

"He wanted to kill you, Jesse."

"It looked like that was the general idea."

"Please don't joke—"

"I'm not. Death isn't a joking matter, but even a Utah court would have cleared me if I'd dropped him in his tracks."

"And you knew it all the time. Jesse, can you read a man's thoughts?"

"Not at all—oh, you mean that business of putting on the long gun for him to see? Ann, you saw everything that I did, but—not knowing just what you were seeing—you didn't draw conclusions. Just think back. He stood at the gate, and he never

made a move to help me unload the carriage or carry our stuff to the house. Most men in this country are glad to lend a stranger a hand, and when one doesn't do it you're entitled to be suspicious. Also, he was wearing a gun. He had his coat buttoned, but the gun showed just the same. Later he came down to the barn while we were unhitching, and he started in then talking big about his shooting—and that isn't exactly usual. When Bowen told me he'd never seen the fellow before, I asked myself why his visit should coincide with mine. The only answer was that he might be interested in me, so I put on a gun where he could see it—just to see what he'd do about it."

He laughed at the recollection.

"Judas! A boy could have figured out that fellow's game after we went out in the yard. Men don't go round challenging strangers to shooting matches without better reasons than a ten-dollar bet—and he was so all-fired anxious that I empty my gun before he did."

"You did shoot first, though."

"Why not? By that time I could have written out just what he'd do. I was safe on two counts. One was that he wouldn't make a break until I'd fired my last shot; the other was that he didn't know about these babies." He patted affectionately the smooth stocks of the twin revolvers. "He figured that the bishop and I would both be looking at the target, not at him. He'd shoot only once, and he'd swear that the gun went off accidentally and blew the back of my head in. A jury would clear him—reasonable doubt, you know—and the chances are that the word would be passed around that my elimination wasn't exactly regretted in some quarters."

"Jesse! He was sent to kill you then. Why?"

"Maybe I married out of my class," he said grimly. "A tin-horn gambler shouldn't elope with a young lady who has a Wells-Fargo—"

"It's that again. Oh, Jesse, let's do something. Let's tell them they can have the money, all of it, if they'll only let us alone!"

For a moment he looked at her. His hand was halfway to his

lips, a cigarette between his fingers. The blue smoke curled lazily until it met the draft of heated air from the candle, then shot toward the ceiling.

"I'd sooner fight," he said quietly; "whether it's for my hide or for what I choose to call my honor—nobody will ever say that Jesse let his wife buy him out of a scrape that he got into with his eyes open. Also, I'm beginning to think our troubles are over."

"What makes you say that?"

"If a certain long-faced apostle—oh, don't get that Mormon-hating look on your face, Ann. The church itself has nothing to do with all this, but one of its leading lights was certainly mixed up in that clumsy game to get your money. Well, if the good brother had really wanted me killed he'd have sent a better man to do the job. What's more, that man would have been told that I carried two short guns and that he'd better look out for them.

"Brother Alvin didn't know about those short guns, and he was the worst-scared man in Zion's happy valleys when he found himself looking at them. He was told that I was a good shot and tolerably quick on the draw, which accounts for his zeal in getting me with an empty gun. There's only one answer to all that—whoever sent Alvin to Ogden City didn't much care which one of us was on the losing end of the argument. When he gets over being scared he'll see that point, and he won't like it, so he'll mince no words in reporting that my patience is exhausted and that the next scalphunter is going to be killed without argument or ceremony. There'll be no mad rush of volunteers for the job. No one in Great Salt Lake City wanted to tackle it—I stayed there long enough to give them all a chance—and so—"

"Jesse! Do you mean to say that you deliberately stayed there to—to give somebody a chance to kill you!"

"Did I give you that idea? I don't want to be killed, Ann, and I don't particularly want to have to kill anybody else. My first thought was to get out of the town, with you, as fast as two

good horses could lay foot to the ground. Then I saw the folly of that. You'd acquired certain enemies, and I had to find out whether they were prepared to go as far as killing. The only place, and the safest place, to learn that was right in Salt Lake City where I had friends, so I stayed there—we stayed there. I'd have stayed until Connor's troops came, if I'd had to, but I found out no one was planning to bushwhack us along the road and that it was safe to leave."

"I think you were very brave, Jesse—both in the way you stayed in Great Salt Lake City and in the way you faced that man today. And I know you did it for me, too."

He did not change his position, but his eyes turned to her white face and the long brown braids which lay over the flowered surface of Mrs. Bowen's quilted bedspread. She felt, like a blow, the impact of his hunger and his desire. She could have moved toward him but did not. As though desire which answered desire were a shameful thing, she turned her face to the wall. *Are you going to speak to me, Jesse? Are you going to say just one word . . . ?* He did not speak although she lay awake for a long time and listened to his even, unhurried breathing.

Chapter X

I

BEYOND OGDEN CITY the road turned from the shoreline of the lake and held to its northern course through broken tumbled hills that rose to the dignity of mountains along the valley of Bear River. Beyond were other and higher peaks and beyond them still others, with naked summits where snow could still be seen in sheltered cañons. In the valleys, everywhere, were little ranches and fields of yellowing wheat and corn swiftly ripening for harvest and friendly, industrious people. There was no place where they were out of sight of a house or of the gray stain of woodsmoke that rose from some hearthside against the blue sky. Jesse repeated a previous statement that it was in

such places that one found the real Mormons and the true strength of the church.

"Whether the church will last or not is just guesswork," he said, "and one man's guess is as good as another's, but these people will last. They've settled wherever water runs or can be made to run, and when a man turns his first furrow it means he's in that place for keeps. Farmers aren't like miners. They don't turn the face of nature upside down and then move on. They take the land itself and build on it and hold it for their children and their grandchildren. They're the real pioneers—not the crazy fools of the gold rush."

"That was almost a sermon, Jesse," said Ann.

"Maybe it was a sermon. It'll be folks like this"—he pointed with his whip to the widening valley and the houses of a little settlement—"who put me and my kind out of business."

Her brow wrinkled.

"You always take it for granted that I know exactly what you're thinking. Do you mean that the Mormons—"

"I mean the Mormons and the Baptists and the Presbyterians and the Seventh-Day Adventists and the Roman Catholics and just the plain Americans. I mean the people in Bear Valley or Cache Valley or the Rio Grande or anywhere that a seed will sprout. They raise a few crops and a few kids, and they build a church and a schoolhouse; and first thing you know they're killing off the gamblers same as they did the panthers and the wolves. There's no room for predatory animals in sound of school bells. What a thought! Maybe I'd better look for a job teaching school—or preaching."

"I think you could do it, Jesse, if you really wanted to."

"Pride speaks, sinful pride," he said sardonically. "Because I am the son of one schoolteacher and the grandson of another—"

"Are you, Jesse?"

"I am . . . and because possibly I remember that all Gaul is divided into three parts and that the product of the means is equal to the product of the extremes I am therefore qualified to transmit that learning. Perhaps, but there is not yet a schoolhouse at every crossroads, and the financial returns from peda

—peda—pedagogy, isn't it? Anyhow, the returns are small. There are more men than children, more miners than farmers, and someone must teach those men that two pair are very valuable before the draw and worth very little after it. And there, my dear, if you but knew it, is one of the secrets of my success in life. Here is another."

A magpie, white and iridescent black, flew across the road and poised on a charred stump. Jesse's left hand gathered the reins more closely, his right produced one of the short-barreled Colts. He fired. The horses leaped suddenly, and the magpie shot straight into the air above the stump. Jesse fired again, and the bird went limp in the air and plummeted to the ground. He checked the frantic team with rein and voice.

"The first shot is in the stump an inch below the top," he said, "the second is through the bird. My holding's all right."

"You're a wonderful shot, Jesse. The men of the emigrant train used to have shooting matches, and I'd go down and watch them; but none of them could shoot like you can."

"I've had good teachers, and one thing they taught me was never to neglect my practice. See that farmer yonder? What I've spent for powder and bullets would keep him and his family for a year." He drew rein as the man cut across the fields toward them.

"I heard shootin' jest now, brother—is anything wrong?"

"Not a thing, friend. Just a magpie that dared me to take a crack at him. He's stolen his last seed, if you're interested."

"You done me a favor. Them pesky critters eat their weight in corn every day, seems like, an' they're scared of nothin' but a gun. Powder an' shot are too dear t' spend on 'em, too."

His eyes ranged over the matched team of chestnut geldings, the polished harness, and the well-turned-out buckboard, then turned again to Jesse.

"Trooper's my name," he volunteered, "James Trooper."

"I'm Jesse Minor, and this is my wife." Ann bowed, but the man did not notice her acknowledgment.

"You're not one of us, I take it, Mr. Minor," he said.

"No—I'm what you call a Gentile, just traveling through the country."

"I'm a State o' Maine man, an' I ain't often mistook in my judgments. I says to myself: 'Fust Gentile that comes through,' I says, 'that looks like he was an honest man, I'll ask him.' You'll excuse the liberty, but you look like you was an honest man."

"Thanks. I try to be. By and large, it pays."

"There's some," said Trooper slowly, "that'd be better f'r knowin' that. Tell me, Mr. Minor, d'you know gold when you see it?"

Jesse's eyes narrowed, but he showed no other signs of surprise at the amazing question. His voice was as placid as the summer morning.

"I've been in and out of California for close on five years," he said. "I've seen enough of it that I ought to know it when I see it again."

"Our folk don't hold with minin', as you might know. Brother Brigham calls gold the invention of the devil, and I misdoubt he's right; but th' devil shouldn't 've invented somethin' that'd help a man t' buy a better plow than what he's got an' a good smooth-bore gun an' mebbe even a rifle." He was talking more swiftly now. "I've said nothin' t' either one of my wives or t' th' bishop. 'Mebbe th' devil led me to it,' I says, 'an I'll wait f'r an honest man t' tell me the truth.' Only day before yesterday, it was . . ."

He fumbled with the string of a muslin sack which he drew from his pocket. Standing between the wheels of the buckboard he laid in Jesse's palm a rough metallic fragment that resembled several small cubes curiously fused one with another. It was heavy and—Ann caught her breath sharply—it was as yellow as a buttercup gleaming in the sun. Jesse gave it scarcely a glance.

"Better men than you or I have been deceived by that stuff, friend," he said. "It's what is called iron pyrites—fool's gold. Let me show you"—he dipped into his pocket—"here's a gold eagle. You won't question what it's made of, I know. Push the

blade of your knife against it. See how easily it cuts? Now try to cut this stuff you found."

The knife blade sank easily into the milled edge of the coin and scarcely scratched the surface of the iron.

"Lots of things look like gold," Jesse continued, "but the real thing doesn't look like anything else. An old prospector told me never to forget that. If there's still any doubt in your mind, get hold of some nitric acid—what some people call aqua fortis. You'll find it will eat that stuff like a rat eating cheese and it won't affect real gold."

"I won't bother," said Trooper. "I'll keep this here, jest f'r an oddity, like, and to tell me that the devil does spread his snares and his pitfalls to delude sinful men. God sent you to me, brother, He surely did. He sent you to show me the error of my ways and to open the eyes that greed had blinded. When you pray t'night pray f'r me as I'll surely pray f'r you. May I make bold t' ask your name agin?"

"Minor. Jesse Minor." Jesse clucked to the horses, and they moved on along the narrow ribbon of red-brown road between the green fields. Ann looked back and saw the farmer standing by the roadside, his hat in his hand, his face turned to the sky.

"The poor devil," said Jesse. "*Mea culpa, domine, mea culpa.*" The poor, poor devil."

There were tears in his eyes when Ann looked quickly at him.

2

They overtook Clem Talbot at the landmark known since the time of Ashley's men as Sheep Rock. There, where Bear River doubled back to the southeast, the road met that branch of the Overland Trail to California known variously as Hudspeth's or Myer's Cutoff—from those who had originally scouted the route in 1849. It led westward from Soda Springs to Raft River, where it joined the older route from Fort Hall to Humboldt Wells. Clem had little to say. He shifted his quid, spat, and grinned.

"Howdy, Miss Ann, yo're lookin' prime," and to Jesse: "I

knowed it was you soon 's I seen thet white sombre-ero. It looked like th' sun was comin' up over th' mounting."

They shook hands, and Jesse climbed over the wheel.

"When did you get in, Clem?"

"Yestiddy—'bout noonin' time."

"Decided to lay over and wait for us, eh?"

"Well—I laid over." For a moment it appeared that the statement would stand unqualified; then as Ann walked to the familiar wagon Clem winked prodigiously. "I had t' lay over—they cleaned me last night, Jess."

"Cards or a horse race?"

"Cyards. Poker. Red-headed feller by th' name o' Fitzjohn done th' cleanin'. They say he's been winnin' all along th' road. Thet's his wagon t'other side of our'n."

"Professional, Clem?"

"He don't look it. Looks more like whut he claims t' be—an emigrator t' Californy, an' he's got his wife with him, too. He shore plays his cyards like a pr'fessional, though. A feller was tellin' me—too late t' do any good—that he made a cleanup at Fort Kearny an' another one at Platte Bridge."

Jesse, stripping the harness from the off horse, gazed over the animal's back to the other wagon and a drab, sullen woman who sat on a wobbly bench beside the wheel. Then Ann returned, the sleeves of her dress streaked with slobber laid there by the oxen and the nuzzling lips of her saddle mare, Lil.

"They remembered me," she exclaimed. "They were really glad to see me, and Lil is as fat as a little pig. I'll ride her tomorrow, Jesse; she needs some of the sassiness taken out of her."

As she chattered she saw at the tail gate of the other wagon a broad-shouldered man with coarse features half hidden by a wiry red beard. For a moment their eyes met, and the man stared back at her boldly. She saw him again, later in the evening, when she and Jesse returned from a walk through the camp. A blanket was spread on the ground between her wagon and the next, and a rope stretched above it to support a large lantern. Five men sat around the blanket, playing cards. Clem was one and another was the red-bearded man, and there

were coins and some crumbled greenbacks on the blanket. Jesse gave her his hand, and she mounted the ladder to the wagon; then he stood by the wheel, watching the cardplayers and the progress of the game. Later, when she peeped through a hole in the canvas, she saw him sitting in the circle at the right of the red-bearded emigrant.

She watched the game for a time, but its intricacies baffled her. She could play euchre and whist, but poker seemed largely a matter of picking up cards and throwing them down again and of such cryptic remarks as "by me," and "good." She laid aside the sewing with which she had busied herself and put out the lantern. She dozed for a time, then roused and put her eye to the peephole once more. There were other spectators watching the game now; silent men who stood in a ring behind the players. The huge lantern—who would carry such a ponderous thing across the plains?—had been lighted, and the illumination from eight candles beat down strongly upon the blanket and threw into almost total eclipse the faces of the players beneath the shadows of their broad hats. There was gold gleaming with the other coins and paper money on the blanket now, and she saw Jesse toss down his cards and saw the red-bearded man reach out a dirty hand and rake in the money.

So this, then, was Jesse Minor's profession? This was teaching men—what was it he had said? Something about the value of two pairs. How silent they were! When Clem Talbot cackled with glee over winning a hand the others looked at him as reprovably as deacons would regard a man who laughed in church. As many women would have set up such a chattering of tongues and shrieking laughter that they would have been heard all over the camp. Men were strange creatures, so simple and obvious in many ways, so mysterious in others. . . . Now it was another man, and then another, who threw down the cards in their hands until only Jesse and Redbeard were playing. The play, so far as Redbeard was concerned, consisted in shoving to the middle of the blanket all the coins and bills which lay before him, then glaring at Jesse. Her husband said nothing until after he, in his turn, had pushed his money across the blanket. Then

he spread his hand face upward and said, "Beat a queen full." Redbeard swore softly—she could see his lips moving behind his beard—and inspected the cards which Jesse had laid down before throwing away his own hand. "I filled a high flush myself," he said. "I'd 've sworn you were pullin' f'r a straight." And Jesse said, "Not always," and the players and spectators laughed. Redbeard rose and said, "Deal me out for one hand," and went to the wagon which stood next to hers. When he came back he carried a small but heavy satchel, and he piled the gold and bills it held in front of him.

"It all plays, stranger," he said and looked across at Jesse. "Luck like yours can't last forever."

"I don't expect to live quite that long," Jesse replied, and again the other men laughed. *A silly game, even if men do take it so deadly seriously.* . . . Ann dropped the rear curtain, undressed, and went to bed.

Voices roused her, and when she opened her eyes she saw that the curtain had been lifted and that the patch of sky it framed was silvered with the first hint of dawn. The game had ended, then, for Jesse was standing at the tail gate talking with someone. It was a woman, and she was crying.

"I tell you b'fore God he didn't send me, mister," she sobbed. "He jest rolled into bed and went t' sleep, and he'd skin me alive if he knowed I was here talkin' to you. Twenty-two hundred dollars y' won from him t'night, mister—twenty-two hundred dollars an' it's every cent we've got in the world. It was th' price of th' farm we was goin' t' buy in Californy. We'll never git there now. We'll starve, an' when he loses at cards he's a devil an' he'll beat me. He's done it b'fore, and he'll do it again. I'm asking you, mister, f'r God's sake, give me some of thet money back. Just th' half of it, mister, an' he'll never know it."

Sobs were strangling her, and as Ann peeped over the tail gate she fell to her knees and clutched at Jesse's boots. He waited until the sobs died away in gasping snuffles.

"Are you finished?" he asked.

"Yes, mister, I've said my last word. F'r God's sake—"

"We had that before, I think. Get up."

She rose slowly. "Mister—"

"You talk too damned much. Go back to your wagon and tell him I said so."

The wails broke out afresh.

"He'll beat me! Fr—"

"If he beats you," said Jesse, "cut his throat. Wait until he's asleep and then push the knife in here, just under the ear. A pointed knife with a broad and heavy blade is best. Push hard, and be sure to go in under the ear—that way you can't miss the big vein of the neck."

"You—you—" She suddenly found words. "You ain't a man, you're a devil!"

She darted out of sight, and Ann slipped back under the bed-clothes as Jesse climbed into the wagon. Their eyes met as his head cleared the top of the tail gate.

"You're awake, Ann?"

"Yes."

"I'm sorry—that trollop was noisier than a crow-roost at sundown—but you'd have been getting up soon anyhow. It's almost another day."

"Jesse—I heard her. I heard every word she said, and you must have a heart of stone. You must give that poor woman back that money. You must!"

She was sitting bolt upright on the narrow cot. Her eyes were flashing. Jesse laughed, a single loud snort which he checked so suddenly that she heard the click of his teeth.

"There's no need of shrieking at me, Ann. If we're going to brawl let's do it decorously."

"Smartness," she snapped, "isn't funny under the circumstances."

"No? Then, my dear, keep your nose out of what isn't your business. That's plain speaking to the point of rudeness, but you brought it on yourself. If Fitzjohn had won, you could walk on your knees from here to the Humboldt Sink, pleading with him, and he'd laugh at you all the way."

"What he might do doesn't matter." She could feel her cheeks flaming with anger. *Keep my nose out of your business. No*

one has ever spoken to me like that, Jesse Minor. "I'm thinking of that poor woman."

"And I'm not."

He was standing at the foot of the bed, and he tossed there at her feet the money with which his pockets were burdened. His fingers flashed over the currency like a pianist's over the keys as he separated gold from silver, coin from paper, and sorted them deftly into piles of similar denomination.

"... Sixteen ... four's twenty ... twenty-two fifty ... twenty-seven. Call it twenty-seven hundred. I did very well, very, very well. Clem will be glad to know his three hundred is back in the family."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Clem got into a game with Fitzjohn last night—or night before last, to be exact, since another day is arriving. He lost all his savings. I staked him for the game he sat in last night—wanting him in it. He lost, of course, but I expected it. Clem will learn, in time, that the man who persists in drawing to inside straights is on a road which leads straight to a pauper's grave."

"All his savings—poor Clem! But you'll give it back to him, of course."

"Of course—not. My dear—"

"Don't call me your dear."

"No? When grown men play cards, Mrs. Minor, they play for keeps, and Clem knows it. You might ask him if he would accept his losses back from me. What he said would be interesting."

"You—you're just what that woman called you!"

"That's a matter of opinion. If I'd lost—"

"But you didn't!"

"I ... don't ... play ... cards ... to ... lose!" He paused deliberately after each word. "I was saying, if I had lost would you have gone whining and sniveling to Fitzjohn, as he calls himself, and asked him to return the money I'd worked so hard for—gambling in Great Salt Lake City? Would you?"

Ann bit her lip. *I'd like to slap you and scratch you and kick*

you, but it wouldn't do any good because nothing can change you. I hate you. I'm married to you; but I'm not your wife, and I won't be until you learn—until you stop being such a proud and haughty devil and so sure that everything you do is right. I hate you.

The sound of voices, quarreling shrilly, rose from the Fitzjohn wagon. There followed the sound—precisely like none other on earth—of a bare hand striking bare flesh. The woman screeched, and the man struck her again and again.

"Jesse! Jesse! She was telling the truth. He *is* beating her!"

"Obviously. If she objects to it, she knows what to do—you heard me tell her. Excellent advice, too, and if I ever beat you, Ann, I hope you follow it. Remember, though, the place to start is at the side, under the ear, and—"

"Jesse! Oh, I hate you!" *There, I said it.* "You're a selfish, cruel, proud devil, and I hate you!"

He folded the bills and placed them in the tail pocket of his coat.

"After you're dressed," he said, "I'll pack the hard stuff away yonder." He pointed to the chest beneath which Peter Carmeny's store of gold had been hidden. "And I think you'll love me some day, Ann—after you acquire a sense of proportion."

He swung his leg over the tail gate and disappeared. She dressed hastily, but he was not in sight when she left the wagon. Clem Talbot squatted by the fire, juggling a skillet lest the frying bacon stick and burn. The coffeepot stood in the hot ashes, removed from the direct flame.

"I've set up th' table, Miss Ann," said Clem. "If you'll git out th' dishes we'll eat in two shakes."

She placed the familiar utensils on the folding table, that was scarred from hard usage on the long journey up the Platte and the Sweetwater.

"Where's Mr. Minor, Clem?"

"Jesse? Gone t' git th' stock. I told him that was my business, but he said th' walk w'd do him good. B'tween us we lost two men's sleep last night."

"Yes. I'm sorry that—"

"Shucks, Miss Ann, yo're like all wimmen—y' set too much store on sleepin'. Losin' a night's sleep don't hurt nobody. 'Course, I'll admit thet after two nights a feller's entitled t' feel a mite drowsy, but one night ain't nothin'."

"I think I'll ride today, Clem." *What utter fools men were!*
"Will you saddle Lil?"

"Soon 's Jesse brings her in, Miss Ann. Say, maybe I oughtn't t' tell ye, but he shore made a killin' last night. He's a poker player fr'm Pokerville in Poke County! Set there with a busted flush, he did, an' made Red Fitzjohn lay down three tens. Raised him outa his boots an' th' socks inside th' boots, and Red couldn't find th' nerve t' call him. An' then, not a quarter hour later, he—"

"The bacon's too hot, Clem. It's smoking—and I'm really not at all interested in that game of cards."

"Not even when yore own husband—"

"No. Not even then."

3

Ann rode in the saddle through that day and the two that followed. After a mile of prancing and shying at every clump of sage, Lil settled down and was content to accommodate her pace to the slow trudge of the oxen and the shuffling walk of Jesse's team, which followed behind the wagon. Clem Talbot slept on the wagon seat, Jesse on that of the buckboard, and Ann had angry thoughts for companions over the day's journey from Sheep Rock to the divide between the Bear River waters and those of the Snake. They made camp on the banks of a swift stream where the men, barefooted and with pantaloons rolled to midthigh, partially dammed off a pool and caught more than fifty trout with a bed sheet for a seine. Jesse and Clem laughed and swore as they splashed in the icy water, and never in her life had Ann tasted anything more delicious than the pink-fleshed fish which Jesse skewered between thin slices of bacon on hardwood sticks and broiled over the coals.

If he thinks I'm going to humble myself and be friendly after the way he talked this morning, he was never more mistaken in

all his life. And she wrapped herself in her resentment as though it were a cloak to be worn in the chilly air of the mountains and sat aloof by the fire while Jesse and Clem smoked and yarned and laughed. He can be ready to kill a man one night and take another man's last cent away from him the next, and now he can sit here laughing like a boy without a care in the world. What kind of a man are you, Jesse?

"... An' they say there was a Gentile visitor that old Brigham wanted t' make a hit with, so when th' boy came up he patted th' little feller on th' head an' says, 'Well, well, yo're a fine little man. Whose boy are you?' Th' kid speaks right up an' he says, 'I'm yore little boy, Brother Brigham, but maw she says you been skippin' her th' last few rounds!' Haw-haw-haw!"

Jesse, who had heard the story and its infinite variations a dozen times, roared appreciatively.

"There's plenty of truth in it, too, Clem. Say, did you hear the one about the marks of spur-rowels all over the footboard of Bishop Hunter's bed and what the bishop said about them? Remind me to tell you some time."

"Spurs . . . ?" Clem turned the thought over for a moment, then burst into bellowing laughter.

"They tell another one," Jesse continued, "about a committee of elders and such going to Brigham with a complaint that the female converts arriving from England weren't—well, they weren't quite the same when they reached Salt Lake City as when they left Liverpool. The brothers were considerably disappointed. Brigham pointed out that the missionaries served without pay and that they'd gone to considerable trouble to round up those converts and transport them, and then he quoted Scripture. 'Thou shalt not,' he said, 'muzzle the ox which treadeth out the corn.'"

Again there was a moment of hesitation before Clem, who preferred his humor raw and unadorned with subtleties, laughed. *Let them enjoy their nasty stories. Jesse is just telling them because he thinks it will plague me. He knows very well that I can bear every word.* "I'm tired," she said. "I haven't ridden for so long that I'm saddlesore. I'm tired, and I'm going to bed."

"Better figure on riding again tomorrow, then," Jesse said coolly. "It's the only thing that will limber up those muscles."

"Thank you. I think I will."

The road dropped by slow degrees into the valley of the Portneuf, now over a barren plain walled by high bare hills, now close to the river with grass hub-deep on either side and countless millions of mosquitoes which drove her speedily to the wagon for gloves and veil. Far ahead were the dim blue outlines of mountains which she heard Jesse say must be beyond the Snake. The peaks seemed to maintain their distance, for they were little more distinct when the three made camp on the banks of the swift Snake River a few hundred yards below the ferry.

"Reckon I'll mosey down there," Clem remarked. "Looks like a place where a feller mout pick up a little news an' permote himself a horn of drinkin' likker."

"Go ahead. D'you want to draw a couple of days' wages?"

Yes. Give him back some of his own money and call it wages. Are you hypocrritical too, Jesse?

"Nope. I still got five 'r six dollars outa that stake you gimme, an' I'm hangin' on to it."

Clem whittled a fresh chew from his plug and sauntered lazily toward the 'dobe shacks. When he was well beyond earshot Jesse spoke quietly.

"We've come a long way from Sheep Rock—isn't it about time you quit acting like a sulky child?"

"I? Sulky?" She achieved, she thought, precisely the right note in the inquiry. "I'm not in the least sulky, Jesse. Has it occurred to you that the fault might be on your side and that you owe me an apology?"

If he asks me what for, I'll tell him. I'll tell him just what I think of him for robbing—yes, robbing—that poor woman.

"No. It hasn't occurred to me, and it's not likely to." Jesse flicked the dust from his white hat with gentle blows of his handkerchief. It was miraculous how he seemed able to keep the hat and his clothing free from the almost inescapable stains of travel. "The only thought I had was that I might drive to

Fort Hall—it's not far—and that you might like to accompany me."

"No, thank you, if you don't mind." *I'll stay here, and what's more I'll shame you. When you get back you'll find that I've washed all your soiled linen and darned your socks and—yes, I'll polish your other boots.*

"I don't mind. Fort Hall, from all I hear, has gone a long way downhill since it lost the emigrant travel." He pulled a light saddle on a Spanish tree from under the seat of the buckboard. "Since you're not going I'll ride and make better time."

An unbidden thought came suddenly to Ann's mind. Jeff Crittenden had told her that he was going to leave Mrs. Purvis at Fort Hall, and he'd said something about traveling north, too, beyond the Snake River.

"Jesse . . ."

"Yes?" His head rose from the far side of the horse he was saddling.

"The wagon train that we started with went through Fort Hall. When you're there will you inquire about Mr. Crittenden—Jeff Crittenden? He said he might leave the train there, and I'd be interested in knowing if he did."

"I'll ask. There's not many trains that go through Fort Hall nowadays, and fewer emigrants that lay over there. Somebody ought to know of him."

"He was a Virginian—a very good-looking, courteous young man—and he rode a beautiful bay horse. People might remember him by those things." *Was that too pointed, or was Jesse Minor so self-centered that he would fail to see that he might be remembered for qualities other than those which Jeff Crittenden possessed?* Jesse had wrapped his trousers about his ankles and tucked them into his boots. He was buckling on a pair of Spanish spurs heavily ornamented with silver.

"You give him a high recommendation," he said drily. "Much better than Clem Talbor's."

"Clem? What did Clem have to say about Jeff Crittenden?"

"Clem got the notion that Mr. Crittenden was in love with you—and he was not in favor. According to Clem, most of the

men of the train looked on Crittenden as a pup who needed a couple of good whippings, also as a Southerner who was forever bragging about the South but who ran away rather than fight for the Confederacy."

"That's not true!" she exclaimed hotly, "and Clem had no right to talk like that. Jeff Crittenden was a gentleman, and he had seen fighting. He told me he had. And as far as calling him a coward—well, there were plenty of young men in that train who should have been fighting for the North."

"Mr. Crittenden has a champion. I'll tell him so if we should meet."

He gathered the reins in his left hand and swung to the saddle. The chestnut horse plunged and bucked madly for a few rods to demonstrate his objection to being ridden, then settled down to a reasonably sedate gait. Jesse halted at the ferry house but did not dismount. He rode on up the river, and presently Clem Talbot appeared, trudging toward the camp. Ann set water on the fire to heat for her washing.

It was almost dark when Jesse returned. He set his saddle on the wagon wheel and rubbed the horse's sweating back dry before turning the animal loose with a slap on the rump. The shirts Ann had laundered hung on a line she had strung from the wagon to the buckboard.

"That's squaw's work," said Jesse curtly. "You didn't marry me to become a washerwoman."

"But, Jesse—"

"You meant well, and I appreciate it—let's understand each other on one point, at least—but just the same I don't like the idea, and I don't want you to do it again. Washing a man's dirty linen is work for a servant—not a wife." He filled the coffeepot with water and set it in the coals. "You've eaten, of course. I had what can pass for a meal at Fort Hall. The coffee, I suspect, was made of yesterday's grounds with dishwater added."

"Did you inquire about Mr. Crittenden, Jesse?"

"I did." He straightened slowly, and laughter flickered like a flame in his eyes. "There aren't many people living in Fort Hall, but they all remembered him. Your genteel Virginia gentle-

man is regarded there as a man whose trail is to be crossed very carefully. It seems that he got into an argument with a fellow over a drink and beat him to the draw in as slick an exhibition of gunplay as Fort Hall has seen in many a day. Killed the other fellow deader than a smelt—"

"There's some awful mistake, Jesse. He's a gentleman—"

"And of course a gentleman would always prefer to be killed rather than defend himself. There's no mistake, Ann. He killed the fellow."

"I wish I could see him. I know he could explain it."

"Maybe he could, and maybe you'll have a chance to hear him. From what I heard he pulled out the day after the shooting, and he's heading for the same place we're bound for—Salmon River and the diggings."

Chapter XI

JEFF CRITTENDEN had not lied when he told Ann Carmeny that he had seen fighting. He was the son of Washburn Crittenden, who farmed forty acres on Birchell's Run, and he sprang from that stratum of Virginia society which is neither gentry nor white trash. Because of his ability as a horse trainer, the young gentlemen of the county accepted him on terms which approached—but never attained—social equality. Horsemanship was something that was taken for granted in a region where every man rode like a centaur, but Jeff Crittenden was almost alone in his ability to school horses for the hunting field. The horses he trained jumped higher and more cleanly, and refused far more rarely, than even imported hunters or those handled by professional trainers, and he had handled many colts for the young men of Chase Courthouse and Cobden. Shrewdly, he had accepted no fees for those services. Once, when Jeff had just passed eighteen, young Duke Sutry had shoved fifty dollars in his hand and had backed away when Jeff had insisted that he

was not a professional and that foxhunting and the training of hunting horses was a gentleman's sport.

"Take the money, Jeff," Marmaduke Sutry had said, "an' buy yo'self a new saddle."

He had not noticed the blood surge to the roots of Jeff's dark hair. They stood, with their horses, at the steps of the Sutry house, and Linda Sutry, Duke's sixteen-year-old sister, was on the porch. Jeff Crittenden tossed the coins, one after another, to the pickaninny who had held his horse. The gold pieces were yellow butterflies dancing in the air and vanishing in the Negro's pink palm.

"Heah, Jephtha," Jeff drawled. "Thanks for holdin' my horse."

The story traveled, and there had been no need for magnification. The Sutrys were rich, and young Duke could have afforded any fee for training the nervous Jezebel—out of Satan's Daughter by Major Callicut's Roger—into a fearless jumper who took brush and water and timber up to four rails in her stride; but fifty dollars was no insignificant sum, and every man and woman, young or old, black or white, gentry or commoner, in the county knew of Jeff Crittenden's circumstances.

"Dammit," swore Colonel Sutry. "Duke should've had betteh sense. The boy's a gentleman." He lit his cigar at the candle on the table, bowing as Mrs. Sutry nodded permission, then tempered his praise. "It's too bad his father handles a plow."

His father handled a plow, and by that symbol Jeff Crittenden could never achieve gentility. Otherwise he might have had a commission when the Cobden Cavalry Company was organized to repel the invasion of the state's soil by the money-grabbing, nigger-loving Yankees, who seemed to want a demonstration of the known fact that one Virginian was a match for any three of them. He was a private, and Duke Sutry was a lieutenant in a yellow sash and heavily frogged jacket; and they rode north and west to a place called Manassas, and there, as a unit in Kirby Smith's brigade, they smashed the blue lines under McDowell. Bull Run was less of a Confederate victory than it was a Union rout, but the Cobden Cavalry was one of the few

Southern organizations which there tasted war with little of the redeeming savor of victory. McDowell's right broke like a brush wattle before a short-jumping horse, and the Cobden boys yelled like madmen as they charged toward the militia companies which were throwing aside rifles and knapsacks as they raced blindly toward the north. And then, as the gleeful troopers swept down the slope toward Cub Run, a line of hard-bitten veteran infantrymen rose before them and poured a musketry volley into their ranks.

Horses stumbled and went down, and those in the rear ranks leaped the struggling forms. Men dropped, and then a fieldpiece boomed at close range and tossed a shell into the gray ranks so close to Jeff Crittenden that he could have touched the projectile with his extended saber. It struck Willie Kelsey, and Willie and his bay horse went down together and mingled one with the other in a bloody mess of torn flesh and limbs. A shredded rag of something hot and wet smacked Jeff across the face. He dashed it to the ground and swung Billy Bay sharply to the left and raked the stallion's flanks with his spurs. A mounted man—an artillery officer by his sash—swung his mount to block the racing stallion; but Billy Bay swerved, and Jeff struck at the man with his reddened fist nor heard himself cursed as a miserable coward.

It had been late afternoon when they had charged the Union right and Heintzelman's regulars had checked them; Jeff's shadow was long in the red dirt of the byroad when his panic left him and he checked the stallion. It was then that he knew genuine fear. Not the unreasoning terror of the shapeless thing that had been Willie Kelsey, but fear of his comrades who had been his neighbors in the county, fear of Colonel Stephens's tongue and of being spread-eagled to a gun carriage with white feathers in his hair to brand him as one who had showed cowardice in the face of the despised Yankees. That story would be carried back to the county. Linda Sutry would hear it, and Gwendoline Huddleson, and Nancy Carline. Jo Peet would hear it, too. She was just white trash; but she'd told him that she loved him, and she'd walked with him—that night before

they rode out of Cobden—down past the school and the cemetery and into the cool hush of the woods back of Tender's place, and she'd given him what he wanted with no more of protest than a nigger. He couldn't face even Jo Peet now, let alone those others.

He determined on flight, and the veteran of a dozen deserts could not have planned more shrewdly. He was not hungry, but he turned in the lane of the first farmhouse he encountered, asked for food for himself and a bait for his mount, and identified himself as a courier bound for Richmond with dispatches telling of a glorious Confederate victory.

"Yes, ma'am. We hit the Yanks like God's grace hittin' a camp meetin', and they run like rabbits. Reckon they won't stop sho't of New York. Mr. Davis can have his Sunday dinner in Washington if he wants to."

The farmer and his wife had heard the cannonading, but their home was beyond the zone of the advance. The man questioned him as to his presence so far to the west of the Richmond turnpike but was quite satisfied by the explanation that troops so blocked the road that a southbound rider would have to take to the fields to make progress. Darkness fell while he was eating, and he accepted the invitation to sleep and rest his horse.

When he left, before dawn, he wore the farmer's Sunday trousers underneath his gray pants and carried the coat of that suit tightly wadded in his saddlebags. A deep pool in a creek which the road forded received his saber—his uncle had borne it in the Mexican War—and he changed to civilian dress and stuffed his uniform jacket and trousers into a hollow tree. He turned to the north, met the National Pike at Cumberland, and rode steadily westward—a civilian, minding his own business and volunteering no information as to its nature. He had about eighty dollars in gold and greenbacks, and he hoarded it like a miser. Meals could be had for the asking at the majority of the farmhouses along the road, and beds were frequently offered as cheerfully. He slept occasionally in haymows and spent money only for tobacco and horseshoes. He had no purpose other than to put as much distance as possible between himself

and the warring armies. His intonation betrayed him as a Southerner, but when explanation was necessary he remarked that he was from western Virginia.

"I come from south of Morgantown. We're not slaveholders in those parts, and we ain't sympathizin' with the slave states and with secession. I've got work promised me in"—and he would name a city a hundred miles to the westward.

Travel in both directions crowded the National Pike. He rode for the best part of a day, sometimes with other horsemen, or walked Billy Bay beside some high-topped wagon laden with household goods. It was from those travelers that he first heard definite mention of California as a goal; of fertile lands which could be obtained for virtually nothing; of a kindly climate where winter was unknown; of gold still waiting for the discoverer in unexplored mountains. Midsummer had passed, it was too late even to think of joining the migration of that year, and he found work through the fall and winter as a clerk in a hardware store in Springfield, Illinois. A farmer in the vicinity pastured Billy Bay in return for the stallion's services to several mares he owned. Jeff slept on a cot in the warehouse of the store, ate at the cheapest boardinghouse he could find, and saved every cent possible from his wages and all of his small peculations from his employer's cash drawer. In April, when he quit his job, he had more than two hundred dollars in cash, new clothes and boots, and a Colt revolving pistol, as the weapon was then called. He had stolen the last from the stock of the store soon after he had been employed there but had kept it in the warehouse where he slept. If the theft had been discovered he was prepared to announce instantly that he had taken the weapon as a protection against those who might break into the warehouse.

He crossed from Illinois into Missouri and rode to St. Joseph, then the railroad terminus and principal outfitting point for western migration. Prices staggered him, and his reluctance to part with any money won for him the reputation of being a close-lipped and sober young fellow who knew what he was about. A casual conversation with an emigrant directed him to

Mrs. Purvis, who was looking for two men competent in the care of cattle and horses to handle her stock on the long journey to California.

"I'm a woman of few words, young man," she said, "but them few are short and right to the point, and if you don't like 'em you can lump 'em. I'll take your word you were raised on a farm because I'm a farm woman myself and I don't have to watch you inspan a yoke or saddle a horse more'n once b'fore I know if you're lying. If you are lying you're going to hear just one word out of my mouth, and that word'll be git, and you'd better git b'fore I take an ox-gad to you. I'll stand for no lally-gaggin' around or layin' in bed until all hours when we're on the move. The stock'll be fed and cared for b'fore you eat yourself, and I'll expect you to keep yourself clean although I've got to admit you don't look like you'd go round lookin' like a hog. I'll pay you good—a dollar a day and your keep—but you'll git the money when we get to Sacramento where Sam Purvis will be waiting."

There was more, considerably more, to the same general effect, but Jeff Crittenden accepted her offer and served her well, not thrusting more than a third of his share of the work upon the other man she had hired. It was that man, John Thorne, a plodding Connecticut yokel, who had first directed Jeff's attention to the Carmeny wagon.

"Wisht I could've hired out t' him 'stead of Mis' Purvis," Thorne had said, "but he's got two men. He's th' richest man in the train, an' there'd be work with him a'ter we git to Californy. An Ohio man, he is. His daughter's with him, an' she couldn't treat them hired men any better if they were her own blood-kin."

The words had conjured a picture of an angular spinster bending above a campfire, and Jeff had displayed little interest. There were other women, not angular, with the train. He had already noted the two plump daughters of Rudolph Kitzmiller, a thick-voiced Pennsylvania Dutchman, and young Mrs. Doane. She was a second wife—Mrs. Purvis was authority for that statement—and she had a gangling stepson nearly her own age

who called her "maw" and giggled at that humor. Mrs. Doane's eyes were dark and heavy-lidded, and they had a trick of looking away quickly when they encountered a man's gaze, then returning with a challenge. Mrs. Doane swung her hips when she walked, too. Jeff Crittenden watched her and listened to the querulous voice of her older, ague-shaken husband, and laughed. Any woman that would wag her backside like that when she walked would . . . well, he thought she would; and it was a long way to Sacramento, and he'd heard little in praise of the Indian women who were the only females one would encounter.

He saw Ann Carmeny first as she returned to the camp from St. Joseph on her saddle mare, Lil. He and John Thorne were feeding Mrs. Purvis's oxen, and Thorne remarked that there was Peter Carmeny's daughter now. Jeff looked up lazily, then swept off his hat and bowed. Ann nodded and smiled gravely. He was of the camp and seemed to know her although she could not recall having met him. She rode well, Jeff decided, as he watched the mare trotting between the wagons. Very well for a northern girl, although her bridle hand—like those of all northern girls—was too heavy. They didn't know what hands were for, these Yankees—but her eyes were gray and distantly cool, and her figure, even in the shapeless habit, showed long slim legs and a straight back. Her skin was pale, almost colorless. The saucy Kitzmiller girls were as brown as chestnuts. *White women ought t' have more sense than to let themselves get the color of field hands. . . .* "What did you say her name was, John?"

"I don't recollect sayin'." Thorne looked up from his examination of a chafed spot on Bolly's neck, close to the yoke. "It's Ann, though."

Jeff talked with Peter Carmeny that night—a nice, civil-spoken young fellow, Peter decided—and on the next halted casually at the Carmeny wagon. . . . "This here is my daughter, Ann. Ann, this is Mr. Crittenden. He's hired out for the trip with that deaf-and-dumb woman, Mrs. Purvis."

"That's right, Miss Carmeny. I'm learnin' to talk on my fingers like a dummy—can't get no other chance for a word."

She had laughed and was friendly and seemed interested in his views of the journey and his opinions of California; and she maintained precisely that same degree of cordiality through the days and weeks which followed. He vowed repeatedly that he would never go near the Carmeny wagon again, but he invariably returned. He had thought that Ann's cool superiority would weaken when her father was stricken and the caravan left her at the Little Sandy with only the two hired men, and he expected that she would beg him to remain with her and escort her to Great Salt Lake City. He was not at all sure what he could do, but he had already planned the gesture with which he would refuse to accompany Mrs. Purvis and take Ann Carmeny into his arms.

She had parried his approaches as though completely unaware of either his purpose or his desire, and through every second of their interview he had known that the long-legged swag-jawed Missourian, Clem Talbot, was watching him and laughing heartily without twitching a muscle of his tanned face. He rode away nor checked Billy Bay's gallop until he had left the Carmeny wagon a mile behind. When he overtook the loose stock which followed the caravan he switched his saddle to another horse and rode all day with the herders.

The forty-four miles of Sublette's Cutoff were covered in a single long drive through all the day and until nearly dawn of the next. Mellish had sent riders on to the Big Sandy, a few miles beyond the last camping place, but they had returned to report that the grazing was too scanty to make a halt worth while. At dusk Crittenden trotted forward through the thick dust and munched cold biscuits and meat at Mrs. Purvis's wagon. Thorne took the horse and dropped behind, nodding when Crittenden shouted his customary warning to keep a good eye on Billy Bay.

During the long night the stallion vanished, and none of the herders could even guess when or where he had strayed from among the other horses and cattle. Half a dozen men volunteered to ride back with Jeff and search for the lost horse—less from any liking for the Virginian than from memory of the

money Billy Bay had won for them and thoughts of races that might still be arranged. They found no trace of the animal nor any trail that seemed worth while following. The horse had been stolen, the veteran Mellish declared, and the theft was the work of Indians. White horsethieves would not operate in a region so unfriendly as the desert along the Sublette Cutoff, and had the horse merely strayed—a most unlikely circumstance—he would have come in to water.

"Them Indians 're slick," he said, "an' they know every inch of this desert. Callin' it a dry haul don't mean there's no water here. That's plenty, if ye know where t' look f'r it, but not more'n enough f'r two 'r three men an' their hosses. I'm guessin' they cut th' stud out 'long with a couple of other hosses, an' when they seen he was a good one they turned th' others loose an' split th' breeze gittin' away."

He advised Crittenden to continue to Fort Hall and there offer a good rifle, together with powder and ball, as a reward for the return of the stallion. An Indian, he declared, would do anything for a modern firearm. Jeff agreed and said that he would remain at the trading post indefinitely if he thought that by so doing he could recover Billy Bay. Camp gossip promptly carried that conversation to Mrs. Purvis, who demanded an explanation.

"I told you b'fore, and now I'm tellin' you again, young fellow, that you won't see one cent of my money until we roll into Sacramento. You contracted to go through with me, and you'd best speak up right now an' tell me what you meant by sayin' you'd lay over in Fort Hall. If you're figgerin' on doin' anything like that you can just git out of my wagon now an' walk th' rest of th' way an' look f'r your vittles at some other fire."

"I had to say something, Mis' Purvis. We're liable t' meet trappers or friendly Injuns anywhere on Ham's Fork or Bear River—Mellish said so. He'll pass the word on to them, and there's a chance that the thieves might bring my hoss to Fort Hall before we get there, which they'd never do if they thought I was goin' right on to California. I just got to go to California now, ma'am; I'm real surprised you got the idea I wasn't."

He smiled ingenuously, and the woman smirked like a school-girl. *You damned old shrew. Where you come from a horse is good only for dragging a plow. How can you know what a good horse means to a man? And do you think I'd fight with you now and maybe have to walk, like you threatened to make me do. Wait . . . just wait.*

Fort Hall was on the left bank of Snake River above the mouth of Portneuf Cañon. Little remained of the substantial structure of 'dobe bricks which the Hudson's Bay Company had erected on the site of the original stockade built by Nathaniel J. Wyeth in 1832. The walls stood, but they were breached in many places, and the 'dobes had been carried away by cartloads and used in other structures. There was even less trace of the good order and discipline which the factors of the Company of Gentlemen Adventurers had demanded and obtained. The population of the outpost was the riffraff of the frontier—more rugged, perhaps, and proportionately less degenerate than the inhabitants of Dogtown, just beyond the limits of the military reservation at Fort Kearny, but no less drunken and bawdy, no less ready to rob or swindle the members of the few emigrant trains which now passed through the settlement. There were Americans and English and French Canadians, an occasional Californian or New Mexican, Indians of half a dozen tribes, and children which represented the promiscuous blending of all those racial stocks. There were gamblers and gambling shacks, whisky sellers in tents and in 'dobe huts, long-haired frauds who talked of strikes of fabulous richness and offered to guide parties directly to spots where pay dirt followed each stroke of the shovel.

"I'm tellin' you, Californy is played out," one of them whined to Yerkes. "Nevady's th' same. It's north where th' gold is now—beyant th' Yellowstone. Y' wouldn't know it t' look at me"—he was filthier than a boar in its wallow—"but I've been rich. I've stood in a crick an' seen th' yellow dust up over th' soles of my boots. Samples I got of it, all I c'd carry, an' then th' In-

juns jumped me, an' they got my hosses an' my outfit, an' I was lucky t' git away with my ha'r. I come out afoot, I did, an' I et porkypines that I killed with a club—et 'em raw 'cause I had no matches—an' I grubbed roots an' et berries; but I c'd go back t' that placer bar straighter'n a bird c'n fly to its nest. I need a stake, an' th' man 'r men that stakes me will be rich f'r life. . . ."

There were half a dozen others, equally dirty and equally destitute, who harped variations upon the same theme. Yerkes and Eyston and Maybeck and the older men of the train were as disgusted with those frauds as with the blowsy prostitutes who shouted so shamelessly from wickiups that were little larger and less clean than dog kennels. Jeff Crittenden enjoyed the experience thoroughly. It was court day at Cobden save that here all was in the open which in Cobden was crowded to the back streets and alleys. He knew that the self-styled guides were liars; knew that the prospectors who talked of golden streams would kill and rob any who might be gullible enough to employ them; knew that the whores were diseased, the gamblers crooked, and that the whisky was alcohol diluted with water, spiked with Cayenne pepper, and colored with tobacco—but he enjoyed it. A man at Fort Laramie had said that the region drained by the Columbia and its tributaries was one of wild country and wilder men; here at Fort Hall was the living demonstration of that statement.

Here, for the first time, Jeff felt that he had left behind him his life on the eastern slope of the Divide. The men who swaggered and bragged at the bars of the Fort Hall grogeries spoke always of lands beyond and of nameless mountains and of rivers whose very courses were subjects for debate and quarrels with one contending that the stream reached the Missouri, another as positive that it was a tributary of the Snake or Columbia. If those men had heard of the war in the South, of Sumter and Bull Run, they said nothing of it. Jeff Crittenden, too, forgot Bull Run and the spurt of blood and guts from what had been his friend. He forgot his flight and the officer who had cursed him for a coward, and he went to Mrs. Purvis and told in a dozen words that he was going no further on the California

road. When that woman of few words expressed her opinion of his treachery he turned and left her, achieving thereby the miracle of striking her into a speechlessness that endured for all of forty seconds.

He had no baggage except his blankets, his saddle, and a small trunk he had bought in St. Joseph. There was nothing in Fort Hall which even pretended to be a hotel, but the storekeeper, a French Canadian named Guyot, gave him permission to spread his bed in the warehouse and offered to feed him for fifty cents a meal.

Jeff had plenty of money, more than he had ever dreamed of owning during his boyhood and more than his father had seen in one sum during his lifetime. There was more than a thousand dollars in gold and several hundred in greenbacks in the belt which slanted across his hips and supported the long-barreled Colt revolver. Ten pounds, including the weapon, but he wore the belt night and day and displayed only the few dollars which he carried in his trousers pocket. A drunken man was easily robbed, so he drank infrequently, and sparingly, and for like reasons refrained from gambling and from meeting, professionally, the post's drab prostitutes. He talked with the trappers, with the squawmen who possessed no obvious means of support, and with the free traders who rode far into the Indian country and bartered with Utah and Bannack and Blackfoot and Crow for furs and dressed buckskins and buffalo robes. To all of them he described his horse and offered any reward in or out of reason if Billy Bay were returned to him at Fort Hall. None of his efforts bore fruit, but from his singlemindedness there sprouted legend. Fort Hall forgot that he had arrived there as a wagon driver in an emigrant train and, presumably, a greenhorn. Because he avoided carousing and gambling, because he bowed with formal courtesy to Goldie and Blanche and the cold-eyed, handsome Madam Hall, he became something of a mystery to bartender and gambler and prostitute—a youth of whom stories could be told and believed.

After two weeks in the outpost he was lonelier than he had ever been in his life. He got no news of his horse, and the ex-

hilaration which had gripped him during the first few days had vanished. There remained only loneliness and a hatred of the white trash—he used the Southern term in all its bitterness—with whom he was forced to associate. He missed the friendly folk of the wagon train, the camaraderie of the campfires, the plump Kitzmiller girls, who giggled as they yielded, and Mrs. Doane, who did not giggle but whose lips were moist and avid, and he missed Ann Carmeny—oh, God, how he missed Ann Carmeny! He ate the supper which Guyot's quarter-white wife prepared and listened to the man's tales of Fort Hall when the factors dined from silver plate and drank vintage wines. The woman moved between stove and table, and her moccasins went *sh-b-b sh-b-b* on the puncheon floor, an odd soft scraping like the sound of a snake's scales on brickwork. She was only a quarter white, and on Sundays she dressed in skirt and bodice of tanned fawnskin as white as milk and banded from the neckline to ankle with rows of creamy elk tusks. For each pair of those tusks an elk had died, and each pair was worth a good pony—Guyot had told him that. She rubbed her cheeks with vermilion, and as she had had no children her body was still slim and her thighs flat beneath the soft garments. . . . Jeff rejected his thoughts. She spoke scarcely half a dozen words of English, the living quarters were merely a wing off one side of the post building, and the slit-eyed Guyot was neither a fool nor blind.

"... An' I tall you all dhis countree, she was a sight more better off onder d' crown dhan onder Was'ington. Dhe factors, dhey would have control all dhis emigration. Dhe wagons would have kep' to dhe roads, an' dhere would have been no robbing an' shooting of Indians. A country needs a king—look at France w'en she have kings an' look at France now. An' now dhis United States she's fighting wit' each odder an' dhat is—"

"It's bad." Jeff sopped the last of the venison gravy from his plate and shoved back his chair. A trapper whom he had met was in the post, and Jeff waited until Guyot entered and sold the man some tobacco, then walked with him to the half-hut,

half-tent proclaimed by straggling letters on the canvas fly to be the LEWIS & CLARK SALOON. They stood at the end of the plank bar, farthest removed from the single door. Nearer the door a man with a round red face in which little piglike eyes squinted from above cushions of fat pounded on the bar and demanded drinks for himself and his companions—two of the hangers-on about the post and one of the girls brought there by the woman who called herself Madam Hall.

"None of yore fancy stuff outa bottles," the man bellowed. "Dip her outo th' kag—th' genuwine old Panther Pis'n—an' don't put yore thumb in th' cup, neither. Drink her down, friends, an' if any one of ye gags I'll slit yore windpipe f'r air."

A knife seemed suddenly to materialize between his fingers. It flickered like gray lightning in the candlelight and thudded into the floor. The blonde girl laughed as she pulled it out and returned it to the sheath on his belt.

"Now ain't you a ring-tailed roarer," she said coolly. "Betcha I know what'll take all that zip an' vinegar outa you."

She whispered in his ear, and the man guffawed until the liquor spilled from the brimming cup and splashed over his wrist.

"Who's the noisy one?" Jeff asked idly.

"Calls himself Bowding," said the trapper. "Claims he made a cleanup in Californy an' cashed fifty thousands in gold with Wells-Fargo an' shipped th' drafts back east so he won't be broke when he gets there. What he's got with him, he says, is just small change, and there's goin' t' be a pretty duel b'tween th' girl an' them two jaspers t' see who gits it. Rackety cuss, ain't he?"

The quartette drank, then another whim seized Bowding.

"Set her up on th' bar—th' kag, I mean, not you, dearie. Now trot out all th' cups you got. Cups enough so's every man in camp c'n have one in both his hands. I got th' only money there is in Fort Hall, savvy?" He slammed a buckskin sack on the bar, and the cups danced and rattled. "That's gold, an' thar's plenty more where it came from. Heave up th' kag, bar-

keep. We'll drink till her bottom's dryer than th' Sink of th' Humboldt. Line up. I want t' see every man in th' camp drunker'n a fiddler's bitch. Line up an' drink with Tom Bowding!"

The proprietor of the Lewis & Clark grinned as he eyed the fat sack and stooped to raise the keg to the level of the bar. The trapper plucked at Jeff's sleeve.

"I ain't in no mood f'r a rhinekaboo—I'm gittin' out."

He moved from his place at the bar, and Jeff followed him. The girl had taken Bowding's hat and was wearing it. Jeff saw that the man's hair had been closely cropped not long before and now stood over his round skull like bristles of a black hedgehog. He was less drunk than he appeared or chose to appear. The trapper, his moccasined feet soundless on the puncheon floor, slipped past him while he was scuffling with the girl, but he heard or saw Jeff and wheeled quickly to place himself in the younger man's path.

"Y' runnin' out on me?" he demanded. "Y' think yo're too high an' mighty t' drink with Tom Bowding?"

"I'm not a drinking man." The response was silly, but Jeff could think of nothing else to say. The girl cackled, and Jeff wondered why he would notice at such a time such trivial details as a chipped front tooth and the crackled appearance of the paint daubed on her cheeks—like sun-blistered siding on a barn. She was much drunker than was Bowding.

"He's too high an' mighty f'r anybody in these parts," she said. "Tell him off, Tommy."

The trapper stood in the doorway, his face expressionless. He watched the two men as he might have watched a pair of bull elk stamping and sparring before the charge. Hides, meat, and horns were alike worthless to him, but the conflict might prove a good show. Bowding's eyes swept Jeff from head to foot.

"Jest an uppity greenhorn—nice an' clean an' all dressed up like a 'Frisco pimp. Git yore belly up t' th' bar, pimp, an' see if that lily-white hide of yore'n will hold man's likker. Git, 'r I'll play mumble-the-peg on yore liver!"

"No." Jeff could feel the muscles of his throat contracting

in a spasm of fear. He wanted to run, but there was no escape save past Bowding. He thought he shrieked the refusal to drink, but the monosyllable came quietly from between his lips, and those in the room, hearing it, were suddenly very still. Then Bowding roared.

"Who 're y' sayin' 'no' to, y' lily-fingered pimp? Git them fingers round a horn o' likker right now, 'r b' Jesus I'll string yore ears on my watch chain. I'll cut yore heart out an' slap it in yore teeth. I'll make a steer—"

"I'm not looking for any trouble, seh. Let me by." The words came unbidden. Jeff felt that he was whining like a schoolboy dragged by the ear to a flogging before the eyes of his classmates, but his constricted throat kept the words to a flat monotone that was indescribably more vicious than Bowding's bellowed threats.

"You—I'll show you!" The man's hand dropped to the curved butt of his revolver. His shoulder hunched—and Jeff drew his own gun and fired twice into the fat body from a distance of less than a yard.

He backed to the bar and returned his weapon to its holster. Bowding was on the floor . . . there was smoke in the air and the bitter odor of powder and the whore was hanging on the bar and screaming on a high, sustained note that seemed as though it would never cease. Jeff lifted his hand, and then the bartender leaned across the bar and slapped her on the mouth, and she whimpered and ran. At the door the trapper thrust out his foot and tripped her. She sprawled on hands and knees, and her skirts flew up, and the man's leathery features wrinkled in a grin. Then he and another man—and Jeff could not recall seeing either move—were kneeling beside Bowding and slapping at the fire which was smoldering in his clothes.

"Deader'n hell," said the stranger, and the trapper replied placidly: "What did y' expect at that range? He asked f'r it, an' he got it—th' guts blowed plumb outa him."

A hand touched Jeff's arm, and he saw the bartender holding a glass toward him.

"Better have a drink," the man said hoarsely.

"No, thank you."

The man retreated slowly, walking backward, and not taking his eyes away from Jeff's

"By Jesus, I will!" he exclaimed and raised the glass to his lips. Jeff laughed. It seemed funny—the man's white face and staring eyes and the brown liquor spilling over the edge of the glass and trickling over his dirty, hairy wrists. What made the man look like that? . . . and then he knew that it was because Jeff Crittenden had killed a man. . . . *I've killed that man Bowding. I've never killed anybody before. The only man I ever even shot at was that Adolphus nigger of Canson's that was stealing a shoat from our pen and the shotgun was loaded with rocksalt and bacon rinds and all it did was sting his black ass good and plenty and it sure cured him of stealing. But I didn't kill him and I have killed this man. He had me cornered and I had to kill him. I wonder what they do in this country when you kill a man? Not much I guess. He went for his gun first and everybody knows it. It was so easy too. . . .*

The trapper and the other man had straightened Bowding's hunched body and had covered his face with the hat which the hurdy-gurdy girl had dropped as she ran. All the men who had been in the saloon were standing around. The trapper spoke to them.

"Some of you fellers that were ready to drink up his money c'n tend to buryin' him. It was an even break, but if any of you want t' make anything out of it I reckon you c'n find an argyment."

He and Jeff walked together out of the place, and Jeff could feel the impact of men's eyes on his back like wind-driven rain. Then they stood in the dark; and the air was cool and sweet in his nostrils, and ahead of him a lamp burned dimly in Guyot's store.

"Nobody's hosstyle," the trapper drawled. "Thar might be some fightin' over what's in his belt but not over who beefed him. A feller what goes round chargin' everything in sight like a bull ellick in rut ought t' be a leetle bit better prepared than that feller was. Tell me, young feller, did y' know 'bout his gun? Was that why y' was so ca'm?"

"I didn't know anything. I never saw the man before. What are you talking about?"

"Well"—the trapper spat and chuckled softly—"thar ain't no harm in tellin' yuh. Y' were ca'm an' y' were fast, an' that's all 'c'n be asked of any man in a rookus. He had a leetle loop of whang-leather hooked over th' hammer of his gun t' hold it in th' scabbard when he was ridin'. It's a good idee, pervidin' a feller remembers t' cast th' loop off long b'fore he's likely t' need that gun in a hurry. Bowding didn't do it, that's all. His gun might've been locked in a trunk f'r all th' good it did him when he started his draw. I was jest a-wonderin' . . ."

"I didn't know it." The information registered slowly on Jeff's mind.

"That's all right. Even if y' had I wouldn't 've blamed yuh. Nobody else knows it either. I jest slipped th' loop off'n th' hammer an' loosed th' gun a mite in its scabbard." He halted as they stepped into the yellow patch of light from Guyot's window. "You campin' here at th' store? Well, I'll mosey round, an' if I hear that anybody's aimin' t' finish what Bowding couldn't I'll come back an' tell ye. I'm figgerin' on pullin out f'r Fort Bridger in th' mornin'."

He took one pace out of the light and was gone, his buckskins blending like shadows with the darkness and his moc-casined feet as soundless as the breeze. He was standing by the door in the morning when Jeff left his bed in the warehouse.

"Thought I'd lay over till I c'd see yuh," he remarked, picking up his words of the night before as though there had been no interruption. "Nobody ain't even thinkin' of gittin' hosstyle. They figger yo're a good man t' let alone—which gives y' a rep-itation that maybe ye'd be worse off if y' tried t' live up to it."

He struck a match and touched the flame to a pipe with a redstone bowl. Jeff pondered the significance of the statement. *He's trying to tell me they're all afraid of me. . . .*

"I've stayed here hopin' to get back that horse of mine," he said at last. "Maybe I'd better move on."

"Might be a good idee—I figger yo're not aimin' t' throw guns

with nobody else, jest t' prove that what y' done t' Bowding wasn't a mistake?"

"No, sir! My Lord, I'm no gunfighter."

"Y' wear a gun." The older man stared at a beetle which was struggling to climb from a wheel rut. "An y' wear it tied down. There's plenty fellers in this country that take such things as an invitation. Mebbe I'm mindin' yore business f'r y', but think it over. S'long."

That was all, but it was as final as the crack of doom. Jeff watched the man cross the irregular area of trampled earth that was Fort Hall's one street and public square. Three horses dozed at a hitching post. The trapper mounted one, and the well-trained packhorses fell in line behind him as he moved off. Jeff watched them out of sight on the Portneuf road, then slowly returned to the store. Guyot was watching him. The trader had said nothing of the death of Bowding, but Jeff knew that he had heard of it in every detail from a dozen sources.

"What talk is there about that business of last night?" Jeff asked him. "I'm not looking for any trouble, but if any friends of that fellow are talking fight I'd like to know about it."

"I don't hear none. Dhey say you t'row gun planty queeck—you wait ontill dhat faller go for gun, d'en you t'row lead. Nobody here no more 'cept tinhorn gamblers an' pimps—dhey not want t'row guns wit' you."

"I'm not a gunfighter—get that idea out of your head, Guyot."

"'Course not. I tell dhem dhat w'en dhey say so."

"So that's what they're saying, is it—that I'm a gunman?"

The trader shrugged until his shoulders almost touched his ears.

"Dhey talk!" Again the shrug. "Tinhorns an' pimps—nobody lissens to dhem but dhemselves. Some of dhem wonder who you are an' w'ere you come here from."

And sooner or later one of them will try to throw guns, as they call it, with me. As long as I wear a gun I'm just a walking

challenge to men like that, and if I leave the gun off it will be worse because . . .

"Let them think anything they want to, Guyot. It looks as though I'll never find my horse, and I'm getting out of this place. I'm going to head for the north—for those new diggings I've been hearing about on the Salmon River."

"She's boom town all over there from Fort Boisé all over. Planty gold. You go by Fort Boisé or you cross at ferry b'low here an' go 'cross Camas Prairie. You say you go—I mak' you good price on good California pony."

Jeff was halfway to the Snake River Ferry, riding a good horse which Guyot had sold him very cheaply, when it occurred to him that the post trader had been more than eager to get rid of him. He could think of nothing to do about it, however, and rode on to the log shacks and 'dobe huts of the ferry buildings. A lean man, wearing the remnants of what had once been a cavalry uniform, sat in the sun on a bench beside the ferryhouse. A comely squaw peeped from the window, then ducked out of sight. *Every man in this country has a woman except me.* He was conscious that the ferryman was inspecting him from head to foot.

"If you're crossin'," the man grunted, "it'll cost a dollar for you an' another for th' hoss. Coin. Dollar-an'-a-quarter apiece if'n you pay in greenbacks. Th' swimmin's free if'n you feel like chancin' it."

"I'm not crossing, not right away. Can I get something to eat here?"

"Meals dollar each. Dollar-an'-a-quarter if'n you pay in greenbacks. Likker is six bits a drink."

Jeff laughed.

"You have a pretty good thing here, haven't you, partner?"

"I ain't arguin'. Take it 'r leave it lay." The man leaned forward to spit, and the walnut butt of an army revolver thrust itself like the head of a striking snake from the breast of his unbuttoned Dragoon jacket.

"I'll take it." This, too: this curt statement of facts, this

readiness to back one's stand with steel and lead, was part of the new land and the life in it. "I'll sleep here tonight and cross in the morning. Is there anybody around here that wants to make half a dollar by bringing my trunk down from Guyot's place? My name's Crittenden—Jeff Crittenden."

The man stiffened visibly. He moved his right hand to a position well away from his body, and with the fingers of his left awkwardly buttoned the faded blue jacket over the gun.

"Yes, sir. There's a Dutch boy workin' here that'll be glad to do it. I'll git him." He rose and sidestepped toward the corner of the building. Them—them prices I gave you—I've never seen you, mister, an' I took you—what I mean is that them prices 're what I ask of them Fort Hall tin horns. You c'n spread yore bed in th' shed yonder—it's clean an' dry—an' th' meals 'll cost four bits each, if that's all right with you."

He had gained the corner of the house while speaking. He vanished, and Jeff heard him shouting: "Hi, Nick! Nick Thiebaldt! Quit whatever you're doin', Dutchy, an' come here."

Jeff dropped the pony's bridle reins and occupied the bench the ferryman had quitted. He chuckled, then laughed aloud, and from the open window above his head he heard an answering giggle from the squaw.

The long day was broken only by the return of the German youth from Fort Hall. Jeff passed the hours on the bench. Seated there he could observe the two roads on the south bank of the Snake, the one leading to the old trading post which Wyeth had founded, the other to Portneuf Cañon, the California road, and the Mormon settlements. Beyond the muddy flood was the north landing of the ferry, the bank scored by the deep ruts of freighters' wagons which crossed occasionally on their way to the settlements on Deer Lodge Creek or, westward, to Fort Boise and the Salmon River diggings.

Directly in front of the bench was the cable anchorage—three huge logs set on end in the ground, banded with iron, and buttressed with rocks. The ferryman, who tried to remember to call himself Brown and not Graham—the name

under which he had deserted from the army at Fort Laramie—busied himself at the anchorage with some mysterious task which called for frequent straightenings of his back and brief surveys of the bench and the man who sat there. Jeff could watch Brown and by turning his head slightly could see a short distance into the room where the squaw worked. Now and then the woman crossed the visible area of puncheon floor. Twice she walked past him to throw dishwater or a pail of slops into the river, and when her black eyes met his she giggled. She flirted with every man who stopped even for an hour at the ferry but had only once gone beyond flirtation. The ferryman had waited until the traveler was out of sight, then taken the dollar the man had given her, tied her by the wrists to the bedposts, and beaten her soundly with a rawhide quirt. Should she offend again, he told her, he would split her nose from browline to lip. She knew the punishment would be merited and that he would keep his promise. She was a Sioux with an eighth part of white blood gained from a grandsire who had been one of Rechaud's half-breed sons at old Fort John and was quite familiar with the tribal penalty for infidelity. The ferryman had bought her for twenty dollars, a stolen Starr carbine, and a quart bottle of whisky. He had married her in tribal fashion before his desertion when the Laramie garrison had been ordered east for duty in the southern theater of war. She loved him savagely and sincerely and since the thrashing had been quite faithful to him.

Thiebaldt returned shortly after noon, and the three men ate together in the ferryhouse. The Sioux girl served them, moving silently between table and stove. Her eyes, when Jeff looked at her, were as impassive as two smooth dark pebbles.

"You c'n leave your trunk in the storeshed," the ferryman said, picking his teeth with a splinter, "an' I'll send it on no'th by the first freight outfit that comes through. If you crossed now you c'd be twenty mile or more on your way by dark. Meek's Spring isn't but twenty-five mile, an' there's good water an' feed there—I'll have th' woman fix you up some grub."

He's afraid of me, Jeff thought exultingly. He wants to get rid

of me just like Guyot did. He's afraid of me, and he doesn't trust the woman. Reckon he knows she doesn't see a real man often. He preened himself mentally and tried to imitate the calm voice of the trapper who had hurried him away from the Lewis & Clark Saloon.

"I'll let you know when I'm crossin', partner."

"Shore, shore. Suit yourself," said Brown hastily. He returned to his task at the anchorage, and Jeff went to the storeroom and spread his blankets on the smooth clay floor. Perhaps the woman—but she went no further from the house than the bench beside the door. He whistled twice, very softly, but she did not turn her head. *Injuns are sure funny. How can anybody sit like that, staring straight ahead, and never even move? I'll get you tonight, I'll bet on it.* She rose with the swift grace of one who has never worn hard shoes and went into the house. Brown followed her, but emerged a few moments later and set about the task of cleaning and recharging a double-barreled ten-gauge shotgun. He poured the powder from a leather flask with a charging nozzle and rammed a wad down each barrel, then rose and sauntered to the storeroom, the gun in the crook of his arm. His eyes flickered momentarily toward the spread blankets.

"Seen you settin' there," he said affably, "an' knowed you wasn't sleepin'. This here shed's th' coolest place there is round here on a hot day." He pawed among some boxes piled on the bench until he found what he sought—a box of irregular bits of lead apparently chopped with a cleaver from a thick sheet of the metal. He poured a handful down each barrel and wadded it home.

"Thet'll fix him! There's some critter—might be a big dog coyote or a lobo bitch with pups t' judge from th' tracks—been hangin' round here every night. I'm gonna put this 'longside th' bed where me an' th' woman sleep, an' if anything does come nosin' round I'll just let drive with both bar'ls through th' door. Shore hope I don't git somethin' else—like one of th' Dutchman's mules."

He drew the twin hammers to half cock and pressed a cap

over each nipple, then hooked his bootheels over the chair rung and tilted himself comfortably against the wall, the shotgun across his lap.

"It'd ruin him," he resumed. "There's two ounces of slugs an' four drams of powder behind 'em in each bar'l. It'd cut him into square hash."

Jeff Crittenden felt—but only for an instant—the same paralyzing fear which had gripped him when he had faced the man Bowding in the saloon bar. *But this man is afraid of me*, he shouted inwardly, *he's as good as said so a dozen times. He's bluffing. He might shoot in the dark, from cover, but he'd never stand up and face a fellow that could shoot back. He'd like to go to Fort Hall and brag that he'd killed me, but he's afraid just the same.*

"Better make sure the mules—and my hoss—are in the corral with the gate shut," he remarked indifferently. He rose and stretched. He stood on the ferryman's left; the muzzles of the shotgun were pointing to the right. It was a crazy way of laying a gun unless a fellow was left-handed, but even so the muzzle would have to be swung in a half circle and the hammers brought to full cock within the time it would take him to complete two strides—he dropped his hands and leaped. He was within the arc of the weapon before the man's fingers had closed on the stock. He gripped the collar of the Dragoon jacket with one hand and with the other drew the long-barreled Colt and jammed it into Brown's ribs.

"Pull those caps," he said coldly. "I don't want to kill you, but I sure will if you make just one wrong move. Pull the caps and throw them over there in the corner . . . now do the same thing with the gun you've got in your shirt. I can kill you before you can cock it, remember. . . . That's good. Lay it on the floor alongside the shotgun."

He drew back. The man kept his hands at the level of his ears. His fingers were quivering, and Jeff slowly returned the Colt to the holster tied to his thigh.

"Lissen a minute, partner—"

"Save your breath," cried Jeff harshly, "and do what I tell you. Yell to your woman to put up some grub for me and then go down to the corral and saddle my hoss."

"You're crossin' over then?"

"No." Jeff answered promptly, but in the brief space between question and reply he had reached a sudden decision. "I'm going south for a spell—to Great Salt Lake City. I'm leavin' my trunk here, and you can send it after me by the first team that comes through—and see that you don't forget it."

"I'll send it—Lew Duggin's due here any day now. Y' needn't fear 'bout th' box."

"That's good—I'd sure hate to have to come after it. Now, get goin'."

Graham, who called himself Brown, stood in the doorway of the storeroom and watched Jeff ride westward toward Portneuf. When horse and rider were a black dot against the dusty hills he picked up his weapons from the floor and shoved the Dragoon revolver into the front of his shirt. Then, whistling casually, he returned to the house and hung the shotgun on the pegs from which he had taken it. The squaw looked up from the pair of moccasins she was beading.

"The young white man has gone," she said in Sioux. It was a statement, not a query.

"Yep." The ferryman's reply was in English. Each of them understood the other's tongue quite well but chose usually to speak in their own. He sat down beside her and pinched the flesh of her thigh. "That son of a bitch was a-tryin' to lay you, Sophie."

"Uh-huh. No do it." She spoke in English for emphasis.

"I know damn well he didn't." He pinched her again. "He's one of them Fort Hall tin horns, that's all. I seen the way he looked at you while we was eatin', an' I jest told him I wanted his room more'n his company. He knew better'n t' give me any back talk."

He slapped the butt of the revolver and half drew the weapon as he spoke, then pushed it quickly back into concealment as he recalled that the chambers were still uncapped. The squaw threaded two blue beads and three white and pushed the needle

through the doubled buckskin. *Were all white men liars as foolish as this one? Did he think that her ears were stopped with clay that she had not heard the young man's angry voice from the storeroom? Were her eyes covered with clay that she had not seen the young man standing there while this one ran to obey his orders?* Her dark eyes measured the length of the shadow of the upright logs of the cable anchorage. The sun was still more than four hours high. . . . *He would ride far before camping, too far for a woman to follow even if she borrowed one of Nick's mules. Too far. Ehpéya nahdi! It was done, thrown away and trampled into the ground. The young white man had passed this way; he would not return.*

"We're due to make money here, Sophie," the ferryman continued expansively. "More an' more men are headin' north. So far they're mostly comin' from th' west, but it won't be long now 'fore we see folks comin' from th' other direction, an' all of 'em will have to cross Snake River. When that time comes we'll sell this here ferry for a damn good price—sell her while business is boomin' an' th' wagons are lined up waitin' to cross like they used t' wait at Platte Bridge—and we'll take a look at that country ourselves. There'll be chances to make good money there—how'd you like that?"

"It is good," she said in the Dakota tongue. She had completed another section of the design on the moccasins. She bit the thread with her strong teeth and pushed the needle into a fold of the leather. "I will go to my work now."

Brown's eyes followed her as she walked to the river and drew a bucket of water. Even under the one-sided burden of the pail she walked with her shoulders back and with the smooth, straight-toed Indian stride, the same from the Lake of the Woods to Tierra del Fuego. In the house, she lifted the pail effortlessly to the table.

Feller was a goddam fool to bring a white woman into this country. They couldn't stand it. They either got to jammerin' an' made life hell f'r a man, or else they sickened an' died. The smart feller was the one that got him a likely young squaw to keep the house tidy and the bed warm—'specially a squaw like

Sophie. She didn't waddle like some squaws did, and she hadn't thickened up round the body an' hips. It was having kids made 'em that way, and she hadn't had any. Maybe it was his fault. He'd chased round plenty in his time, but so far he knew there wasn't anything that could call him pop. Maybe it was better. There were too many halfbreeds. He'd seen a God's plenty of 'em among the Sioux 'long the Platte, and there wasn't a one that didn't have more'n his share of all the orneryness of both white and red. Babies would make her fat, too, and then she'd be just another squaw. She didn't seem to be sorry about it. Some women seemed to really want kids, but Sophie never let out a yip. Sophie was all right. Next time a freighter came through he'd send for some red flannel, and she could make herself a real fancy dress. Women set a lot of store on foofaraw like that, an' a man c'd do a lot worse in this country than tie up with a girl like Sophie. She hadn't smarted up to that Crittenden, either—that feller was sure poison. He was wise. He didn't go to backin' off an' makin' a war talk, an' then waitin' t' see what a feller was goin' to do about it. Nope, he was as quiet-spoken as a Methody preacher until he saw his chance—an' then he was faster than a rattlesnake an' had a gun in a feller's ribs 'fore yuh knowed it. Well, it took all kinda fellers t' make a new country, an' a jasper like Crittenden was one of 'em. I should've had sense enough not to try a sandy on him. He was smartin' up to Sophie, all right, but she wasn't gittin itchy 'bout him. Kee-rist, I mighta been killed! An' what for? Just a squaw, an' th' mountains 're full of 'em.

Chapter XII

I

JEFF CRITTENDEN could find no one in Great Salt Lake City who had even heard of Peter Carmeny. He visited the offices of the *Deseret News*—a young elder name Thomas Medbridge was correcting proof at a desk on the further side of the room—and inspected the rosters of the various emigrant trains which

had passed through the city since July, but the names he sought were on none of those lists. The season was already well advanced, and only one group of California-bound migrants was camped in the city when he arrived. The Carmenys were not of that group. It did not occur to him that Peter might have died or that Ann might have married, and he did not extend his search to the death notices or the brief paragraphs accorded Gentile marriages.

He found that ordinary living expenses in the Mormon capital were expensive and that there was no employment for Gentiles who possessed no particular qualifications. Browning, the rifle maker in Ogden City, could have given work to any number of skilled mechanics, but he was too busy—and too irascible—even to talk to a man who knew nothing of tools, of the properties of metals, of forging, or of the fine skill required to harden a spring and then anneal it to the proper temper. Blacksmiths, weavers, wagon builders, carpenters, masons—there was work for all of them, regardless of religion, in the city itself and in the newer settlements along the line of the Spanish Trail to the south, but Jeff Crittenden had no trade save the training of horses for fox hunting—as useless a profession as any man could possess in this new country. He did not seek work with any particular zeal. His wish—and the desire was but vaguely defined even to himself—was to acquire in some manner sufficient wealth to permit an existence similar to that of the gentry of the Tidewater counties: a life of hunting and dancing, of Negro slaves who groomed a gentleman's horses and polished a gentleman's boots and who served cool juleps to gentlemen who sat on deep verandas. He was intensely surprised by the brief reports which the *Deseret News* published of the war's progress. The Yankees, who had run like panicky sheep at Manassas, seemed unwilling to be licked. Mr. Davis had eaten no meals in Washington, and the ports of Charleston and Savannah were blockaded by Yankee gunboats so that no cotton could be shipped to idle mills in England. The war was far away, and only the Gentiles in Utah seemed at all interested in its progress or its result. It might have been taking place on an-

other planet so far as the rank and file of the Mormons were concerned. Jeff attended a Sunday meeting in the Tabernacle at which President Brigham Young declared that Confederate arms were everywhere victorious and that the Union, which had so persecuted the Latter Day Saints, was going down to destruction. The people cheered dutifully, but they made far more active response to a statement by another leader regarding a military force which was being assembled in California for duty in Utah.

"We are told they are coming to guard the stage route and to protect us from the Indians," the man shouted. "The Nauvoo Legion can do that, just as it has done ever since the Saints came into this valley and planted the standard of Zion on the mountains. Israel will bear witness that we don't want these Gentile soldiers coming here to corrupt our young people and our women. We don't want them, and we won't have them—and let all Israel shout amen!"

He paused, and the roar that followed was wholly spontaneous. A man seated several rows in front of Jeff stood up on the bench and screamed a sentence of which the Virginian caught only two words—Lot Smith. The speaker on the platform raised his hands, and the tumult subsided.

"Some of you heard what Brother Clawson said," he bellowed, "and I want to shout amen to it. Now is the time to lay truth once more to the line and justice to the plummet. Brother Lot Smith will take care of these mobocrat invaders just as he took care of Johnston's Army five years ago. We don't want trouble—we ask nothing except to be let alone and to live our religion according to God and our prophet—but if trouble comes we will be ready for it. Let them come, say I, and they will find that Zion is ready for them and has a place prepared for them. They can go to Camp Floyd, just as Johnston did, and they can guard the mail routes from there and meddle in our affairs from there."

For some reason the mention of Camp Floyd was considered humorous. The men of the congregation laughed heartily, and Jeff heard an undercurrent of tittering feminine laughter and

saw smiles on the faces of some of the thin-lipped, bonneted women who sat near him. Later in the day, while walking on the State Road toward Public Square, he encountered a Gentile shopkeeper from whom he had purchased cigars and other small necessities. The man recognized him and nodded, and Jeff fell into step beside him, later mentioning the sermon which he had heard.

"Camp Floyd's more than forty miles from here, over on the west side of Utah Lake," the man said. "That's where the Old Boss told Johnston he could camp—and Johnston did it. Maybe he had his orders to eat all the crow that Brigham dished up for him, maybe he'd had such a hell of a time in the mountains that he was tickled to death to make any terms so long as Lot Smith and the boys would leave him alone. This fellow that I hear is coming from California—Connor's his name—is a different breed of cat. He's a fightin' Irishman, and he's a Roman Catholic; and he's got little use and no respect for Mormons. Did y' ever see two tomcats meet on a fence, or two dogs in a narrow alley? That's what it'll be like when Pat Connor meets old Brigham—one of 'em will back up, or the air will be full of fur. It'll be Brother Brigham, too. Times have changed a heap since '57, and the Old Boss knows it. There's too many of us Gentiles here now, and if he talks about burning the city—like he talked when Johnston was at Fort Bridger—we'll have something to say about it. And if he moves all the faithful Saints south to Fillmore—he made a play at that in '58, you know—he'll just be givin' the capital to the Gentiles, and he knows it. Brigham's in between a chill and a sweat right now. He'd make an apostle of the man who'd show him any way out except by backin' down to a Gentile."

September was drawing to a close when Jeff Crittenden heard that sermon. There were no more emigrant trains from the east, but travelers arrived almost daily from the west by their own conveyances or on the stage which gave a bi-weekly service across the new territory of Nevada. Jeff met as many of those travelers as he could and inquired of them if they knew of a Peter Carmeny who had presumably arrived in California a few

weeks before. All shook their heads. One man remarked that emigrants, on arrival in Sacramento, scattered like a covey of quail at a shot. It would be best, he declared, for Jeff to follow the southern road to Los Angeles Pueblo and work northward from there. A wealthy man such as his friend Peter Carmeny would probably be found in one of the larger centers of population, and those, when all was said, were not many in number.

Jeff admitted politely that there was much in favor of the suggestion, but he mentally rejected it while he spoke. He knew that Ann and her father had been in Great Salt Lake City, and he felt that it was there he would pick up their trail. They would be glad to see him. Peter Carmeny would probably offer him work—the nature of that employment defined itself very vaguely to Jeff—and Ann's still, grave face would brighten with a quick smile. The prospect was a pleasant one.

He sent the horse he had ridden from Fort Hall to pasture in the Wasatch foothills near the mouth of Little Cottonwood Cañon and found room and board for himself in the home of Bishop Gregg in the Eighth Ward. He was compelled to dip again and again into the money belt about his waist, and the constant outgo, with no immediate prospect of income, worried him considerably. Then, quite by accident, he replenished his store of funds.

The saloons and gambling houses—usually operated in connection—were the only places where an unmarried and friendless Gentile could meet his fellows. Jeff did not gamble, and he confined his drinking to the light lager beer made in the brewery which Brigham Young had established and in which he still retained a controlling interest. Other Gentiles were far less temperate, and drunken men were by no means an unusual sight, particularly after nightfall. Jeff, taking a short cut through the alley which passed behind the Colorado Stables, stumbled over a man who had wandered into the alley and there collapsed in a drunken stupor. The Virginian struck a match and recognized the unconscious man as one he had seen here and there about town and in the dingy lobby of the Salt Lake House. He reeled helplessly when Jeff tried to lift him, and the Virginian

felt the unmistakable outline of a money belt beneath the man's shirt. It was too easy to unbuckle and withdraw the belt, then to lower the drunken man to the ground and walk from the alley. When he reached his room at Bishop Gregg's he found himself richer by eight hundred dollars, three hundred of it in gold.

2

The attitude of the Mormons changed after it became common knowledge that the California troops under Connor were on their way to the valley. There was no open hostility, but the Gentiles were aware of a rude surliness which replaced the former toleration of their presence. At times, veterans declared, the situation approached that of the old days of '57 when Brigham and Jedediah Grant shrieked from the tabernacle pulpit for the whetting of Bowie knives and the letting of the blood of Gentile intruders, of apostates, and of Saints who were weak in faith.

In that city there were but two divisions of all mankind. One was a Latter Day Saint—a Mormon—or one was a Gentile. The Gentile might be black or white, English, American, German, or Kanaka; Protestant, Jew, or Roman Catholic, he remained a Gentile, and any mention of his name was accompanied by that description. Now the word was spoken more bitterly and often accompanied by "spy." A recently arrived Gentile without visible means of support became almost overnight a Gentile spy. Jeff Crittenden heard the term whispered twice, not too softly, in the course of one walk along Main Street south of the Temple Block. He mentioned the matter to Bishop Gregg.

"I wish you'd let folks know," he complained, "that I ain't got any more use than they have for these Yankee soldiers that're coming. I'm a Virginian. I've fought against them, and I'll sure never line up on their side."

"There has been some talk about you," the bishop admitted placidly. "I have been asked what you were doing here in Great Salt Lake City and have had to say that I didn't know."

"Why didn't you ask me?" Jeff drawled, again imitating the

composure of the Fort Hall trapper. "I'd have told you quick enough. I'm looking for a couple of things—some friends of mine and a hoss that was stolen by Injuns on Sublette's Cutoff. The friends came through here early in July, so it's here that I'm trying to pick up their trail; and I'm told that if the Injuns try to sell the hoss they'll probably come here to do it. That's all."

"Yes." The bishop seemed neither convinced nor particularly skeptical of the truth of the statement. "People like to imagine mysteries sometimes. Our neighbor"—he jerked his thumb toward the house next door—"our neighbor, Brother Vogt, can't make up his mind whether you are a spy for this man Connor or a Wells-Fargo detective."

"I'm neither, and I wish you'd tell him so. I'm just a—a Gentile that's staying in Utah and paying his own way and minding his own business."

"You plan to make this your home, then?" A light kindled in the bishop's eye.

"I might." *I'm not going to tell you too much of my business, you old goat. A fellow might do worse than stay here, at that. These Mormons are a simple-minded bunch; but some of 'em have money, and a smart man might make a nice stake. I wish I knew how you go about starting a bank—look at the money Wells-Fargo have made.*

"I did not know that," Gregg continued. "If you plan on making our city your home you should put an end even to the possibility of gossip about you. You should be one of us—join the Saints and be saved in this world and in the world to come. I will be glad to instruct you."

"I was raised a—a Protestant. I don't know much about Mormonism, but I reckon I don't hold with it much. Excuse me for sayin' 'Mormonism'; I know you don't like it and w'd rather be called Latter Day Saints."

"Both are good names. I am not one of those who think that 'Mormon' was given to us in derision by the Gentiles. The Prophet Joseph Smith named the book he translated The Book of Mormon, and he explained the word so that everyone could

understand. It means 'more good.' Listen—it won't hurt you to know something of our faith."

He was the zealot now, fanatical but wholly sincere. He was of the rank and file who had suffered at Adam-ondi-ahman and Nauvoo and Winter Quarters, who had crossed the plains and endured uncomplainingly the bleak early years in Deseret. He was of those who believed because his mind was incapable of entertaining doubt. He could preach, he could exhort, but he could comprehend a metaphysical argument or dialectics as little as he could the presentation of one of the Upanishads in the original Sanskrit. The history of Mormonism would never mention him or his fellows, but in them and their loyalty and their simple faith was all that was saintly in the record of the Latter Day Saints. He crossed the room and selected a pamphlet from a number on a shelf.

"Here are the Prophet's own words, and you will see that we Saints are honored when we are called 'Mormons.' " He thumbed the pages, then read: "'Before I give a definition to the word, let me say that the Bible, in its widest sense, means good; for the Saviour says, according to the Gospel of St. John, 'I am the Good Shepherd'; and it will not be beyond the common use of terms to say that good is amongst the most important in use, and, though known by various names in different languages, still its meaning is the same, and is ever in opposition to bad. We say from the Saxon, *good*; the Dane, *god*; the Goth, *goda*; the German, *gut*; the Dutch, *goed*; the Latin, *bonus*; the Greek, *kalos*; the Hebrew, *tob*; the Egyptian, *mo*. Hence, with the addition of more, or the contraction *mor*, we have the word Mormon, which means literally *more good*.'"

"That don't—" Jeff closed his lips quickly. *That don't make good sense to me.* The bishop seemed unaware that he had spoken.

"I do not want to hurry you. There can be no conversion without faith and no faith without belief. I want you to take these books to your room and read them. Here is the Book of Mormon, and Doctrines and Covenants, and here are several pamphlets written by the Apostle Parley Pratt, who was mur-

dered by the Gentiles in Arkansas five years ago. Read them all, and then come and talk to me."

"Thank you." Jeff Crittenden was always polite. "I'll take good care of them, sir, and I'll read them too—if I'm not run out of town when this Colonel Connor comes."

"Which will be soon," said the bishop sadly. "The stage which came in today passed the soldiers in Dugway Pass. That is only about sixty miles from Camp Floyd."

"You figure they'll stay out there?"

"Of course. Our people are on excellent terms with the federal officers that are here now. General Harding won't let Colonel Connor do anything rash. He will advise him to hold his men at Floyd."

Jeff heard other Mormons make the same statement, coupled with the boast that the Nauvoo Legion could annihilate—if it so desired—the small force under Connor's command. No one seemed particularly surprised at the news that the California troops had reached the campsite west of Utah Lake and had made bivouac there. They had even changed the name of the place, it was announced. It was now Fort Crittenden because John B. Floyd, Secretary of War under President Buchanan, was now fighting in the rebel army and an aide of Connor's had declared that loyal troops would never honor with their presence a post named for a secessionist and a traitor. The coincidence in the names caused occasional moments of embarrassment for Jeff Crittenden, who was unrelated to, and had never heard of, the fiery Kentucky statesman, John Jordan Crittenden.

The Mormons accepted the change in the post's name as the best possible evidence that the encampment would be permanent and that the military would be a very distant threat to Brigham Young and the Mormon leaders. So the Saints argued, and the streets of the city were crowded that night as they had not been in weeks. There was no organized demonstrations; but the people were jubilant, and Brigham Young was cheered like a conqueror when he traveled the length of Main Street with his First Counselor, Heber C. Kimball, beside him on the seat of a C-spring barouche driven by a grinning Negro. The exult-

ant Saints crowded Jeff Crittenden back against a storefront, and he found himself pressing shoulders with a tall man with a red-brown beard and long, drooping mustaches. The stranger's clothes were foxed with buckskin at cuff and elbow; his knee-high cowhide boots were worn and patched.

"I don't hear y' yelpin' none, pardner," the man grumbled. "Seems like y're a Gentile an' not one of these witless Mormonites, heh?"

"You're a stranger," Jeff countered. "These folks are witless, all right, but they don't like being told so. It's best to keep your tongue pretty close to your teeth round here."

"I'll lay my tongue where I feel like layin' it, an' them that feel like clippin' it 're welcome t' try. I've seen nobody yet thet looks ekal to it." He seemed to glance neither to left nor right before he spat a stream of golden-brown tobacco juice over the broadcloth coattails of a bearded man who stood directly in front of them, on tiptoe to see over the shoulders of those who crowded the curb. "That for 'em! Come t'morrow 'r next day, an' these here Mormonites will be hidin' so deep ye'll need a prod-din'-pole t' git 'em outa their holes."

No one had noticed his contemptuous act, but Jeff gripped his elbow and steered him along the sidewalk toward the corner of First South Street.

"Let's get out of this push, friend," he said. "I'll buy a drink."

"That's handsome talk! I've come forty mile—clear from Camp Floyd 'r Crittenden 'r whatever they call it—jest on th' chance of mebbe smellin' a horn of likker. I got t' tell ye, pardner, that there can't be no return buyin' till th' Californy Colyum gits here an' us teamsters is paid off. I'm as clean of monéy as a snake is of feathers."

He pulled out, one after the other, the pockets of his ragged trousers. Jeff steered him into the bar next door to Clement's Pantechnicon on Main Street and pressed a five-dollar green-back into the man's palm.

"Here—I'll take a chance on you. You can pay me back when you're paid off. You'll see me round town."

"That's handsome of you—no, it ain't, it's plumb noble." The

red-bearded man pushed through to the bar and demanded whisky.

"I'm buying this one," Jeff interrupted. "I told you I would. Give my friend his whisky, Ed, and give me a glass of beer."

He carried the drinks to one of the side tables across the room from the bar. The stranger delayed only long enough to buy a quart bottle of whisky, then joined Jeff at the table, jingling in his palm the few silver coins he had received in change.

"By God, they think less of Yankee greenbacks here than they do in Californy," he complained. "A five is worth four-fifty in hard money out there—all that bartender would allow me was four-twenty."

"Remember that when you're paid off," Jeff remarked. "If you get gold—"

"We will. Captain Wallace brung it with him in a chest."

"Make them pay for it when you spend it, then. Don't let it go at greenback rates like some of the strangers here do."

"Thanks. I'll remember. I remember most things, I do." He drained the glass, refilled it from the bottle, and tossed the liquor down his throat as though it were water. "I never forget a feller that gives me a friendly hand, neither. Fairweather's my name, pardner, Bill Fairweather."

"And mine's Crittenden—same as the camp where you say you came from. My friends call me Jeff." He waited while Fairweather took another drink. A man entered the place, gave a note to the bartender, and turned slowly toward the door. He glared at the Gentiles who stood at the bar or sat at the tables.

"Take a good look at that fellow," Jeff whispered, "so you'll know him if you see him again. His name's Burton, and he's chief of police here. He's a good man to keep clear of."

The official could not have overheard the words, but he suspected that he was their subject. He checked his stride toward the door and scowled at the two men. Jeff did not move, but Fairweather pushed back his chair and rose. He grinned, disclosing long teeth as yellow and as strong as a horse's, and with his fingertips flipped up the ends of his long mustaches.

"Look me over, partner," he yelled. "That's what I'm here for."

I'm Bill Fairweather, and I'm a curly wolf from Canady. When I howl I set th' Northern Lights t' jumpin'. D'you think you'll know me when you see me agin?"

Burton did not reply. He was a florid man, but he was white with rage as he left the barroom.

"Are you looking for trouble, Bill?" the Virginian asked. "He'll be laying for you and—"

"Let him lay!" Fairweather poured another drink. Any man in the room could hear his words. "Th' rooster that crows th' loudest is th' first one t' land in th' stewpot. Come another week, an' him an' all th' rest of these Mormonite bastards will be sayin' 'yes, sir' an' 'no, sir' every time they see a uniform. Pat Connor's th' boy that'll tame 'em. We hadn't more'n got t' Camp Floyd b'fore he was givin' orders t' shoe th' horses that needed it an' git everything in shape. Then he's marchin' in t' Salt Lake City—horse, foot, an' guns—an' if th' Mormonites are lookin' f'r trouble all they've got t' do is ask f'r it, an' they won't have t' ask loud. He'll hear 'em if they only whisper. Th' camp's t' be up on th' first bench, jest east of th' city, where he c'n drop a cannonball right smack into old Brigham's window!"

"There'll be a battle sure," Jeff told him. "The talk here is that the Nauvoo Legion already has its orders and that they'll fire on the first troops that cross the Jordan River."

Fairweather, well on his way to drunkenness now, laughed wolfishly.

"They'd better have all hell t' help 'em then! D'you know what Pat Connor said when he was told he was expected t' stay in Camp Floyd? 'I'm crossin th' Jordan River an' marchin' through th' city,' he says, 'an' all hell can't stop me.' That's th' kind of a rooster he is!"

3

The drunken man's prophecy was fulfilled. The California troops led by Patrick Edward Connor entered Great Salt Lake City before the week was ended. There was no battle. The battalions forded the knee-deep Jordan River and marched over the stage route which followed the right bank of that stream be-

fore swinging eastward to become the continuation of Main Street, South. None of the boastful threats of the Mormon leaders was fulfilled. No one knew the whereabouts of Brigham Young, Heber Kimball, or Daniel H. Wells; and the Nauvoo Legion—made up of every Mormon male old enough to bear arms—was quite invisible. The sidewalks along Main and Temple streets were deserted except for the Gentile residents, who tried not to display too obviously their delight.

The ginger-whiskered Connor rode at the head of the column. His staff was in line behind him, followed by two of the cavalry companies, the guns, the infantry, and the supply trains, which were followed by a final company of cavalry as rear guard. The men looked stern and capable. They marched at attention, muskets sloped, left hands swinging smartly. The muskets were loaded and capped, the cannon shotted. At the square they made a right turn into Temple Street, and the tramp of clattering hooves and marching feet were echoed from the walls of the Lion House and the Beehive House and Brigham Young's offices. Only the most attentive watcher would have seen a window curtain twitch occasionally to betray the interest of those who were not sufficiently bold to appear on the street; only one familiar with the history of Mormonism since the death of Joseph Smith would know that he was witnessing the passing of an era which could never be repeated. Brigham Young, the Lion of the Lord, for fifteen years the religious, political, and economic tyrant of all the territory between the Rocky Mountains and the Sierras, had met his master in the thin-lipped, wiry, little Irish-Catholic who led the California Volunteers. The Lion of the Lord would roar again, and loudly, but never with the same convincing authority.

Jeff Crittenden followed the procession for the full length of Main Street. It was not until the column turned at the Temple Square that he noticed the officer who rode on the right flank of the staff behind Colonel Connor. He was a tall man with a full black beard who rode with the easy seat of the born horseman. A tarnished golden oak leaf was on each shoulder strap of his faded uniform, and the triple galloons of a major orna-

mented his sleeves. Jeff Crittenden paid little attention either to the man or his dress. He ran past the head of the column and cut across the street so that he could observe more closely the horse which the officer rode—a blood-bay stallion with a white star between his widely spaced dark eyes, the horse that had carried Jeff Crittenden away from Manassas, the stallion Billy Bay which had been stolen during the night drive across the sandy wastes of Sublette's Cutoff.

He did not attempt to see the major until the next day, then hired a horse and rode to the camp, which had been located on the first bench more than a mile east of the city. A flagpole was already in place, guards were posted, and a crudely lettered sign informed the visitor that he was entering Camp Douglas. Jeff got no further than the corporal of the guard, who—since Jeff did not know the major's name and declined to state the nature of his business—decided that he was a Mormon spy and ordered him to leave the camp. The Virginian waited for several hours in the shadow of the cottonwoods where the rutted road turned to climb to the benchland, but the officer did not appear.

Colonel Connor, though fearing Brigham Young rather less than he did the flies which buzzed along the picket lines, had no wish to precipitate a clash with the Mormon leader. The troops were held within the limits of the camp, and liberty to visit the city was given only to small groups of trustworthy men in charge of non-commissioned officers. The orders were to avoid all arguments, drink no hard liquor, keep away from women, and return to the camp before dark—orders which precluded everything in the way of soldierly enjoyment. The officers of the command came to the city only to arrange for forage and supplies or for conferences with the federal officers, Governor Stephen S. Harding, James Doty, the Superintendent of Indian Affairs, and the federal judges, Drake and Waite. More than a week passed before Jeff Crittenden saw the major he was seeking leave the Salt Lake House and cross the sidewalk to where an orderly waited with two horses. Jeff ran after him and touched his arm.

"Major, sir," he said hurriedly, "I'd like to talk to you, sir,

about that bay horse you've got—the one you rode in the parade the other day?"

"What about it?" The man's eyes were as black as his beard, his voice cold. Jeff Crittenden had been a soldier long enough to acquire a lively fear of majors.

"C'n I ask where you got him, sir? You see, he's my hoss—I call him Billy Bay, and I raised him from a colt."

"You did." The major seemed amused.

"Yes, sir. He was stolen—the Injuns run him off—on the Cutoff 'tween Green River and the Big Sandy."

The major took the bridle reins from his orderly. The horse was not Billy Bay—just an ordinary cavalry charger.

"You're the fourth man—close as I can remember—to make a claim that you own that bay stud," the officer said at last. "The others were liars, all of 'em, but I'm not so sure about you. I'll—yes, damme, I'll give you a chance. I'll be busy tomorrow, but come out to the camp the next afternoon. If the horse acts like he's used to your handling him, I'll have a talk with you."

"Billy will know me—you needn't fret 'bout that, sir."

"Are you a Virginian?" the officer asked quickly.

"I come from the western end of the state, sir—from near Morgantown." Jeff had told that story before; he repeated it again without hesitation. "We're Union over there—not secesh."

"Hm. You sure talk like Tidewater. I'm—never mind. Come to the camp and ask for Major Clarke. What's your name, by the way?"

"Crittenden, sir."

"That's Kentucky—Piedmont, too. Well, it doesn't matter. I'll leave a note at the guard tent that you're to be passed in to see me."

He mounted, and the wooden-faced orderly swung to the saddle of the other horse. Jeff Crittenden watched them ride away. *That sojer's a dam' Yankee. Anybody could tell that from the way he rides—as stiff-bellied as a frozen snake. The major, he's different. When he puts his seat t' leather it stays there. He knows hossflesh, he shows it from the way he rides that*

cavalry plug. There's Clarkes in Richmond, but he couldn't be one of 'em—not a Yankee major. First thing I'll tell him will be to look 'longside of Billy's right ear and he'll find a drawn-up scar 'bout half as long as my finger. Nobody that hadn't bridled Billy would ever know it was there.

That night, in the California Saloon, he met the big teamster, Bill Fairweather, and was repaid the loan he had advanced. All of the drivers, said Fairweather, had been paid off earlier in the day and advised not to hang around Great Salt Lake City until all their money was gone.

"Some of 'em's talkin' 'bout headin' back t' Californy—but not me. I come west huntin' gold, an' now I've got a stake I'm gonna find some. I'm lookin' fr a strike—th' kind where I c'n take hold of th' gold with my two hands and not git it by sellin' stock in a hole in th' ground like at Virginia City. I'm headin' fr that new strike in th' Beaverhead country—th' camp they call Bannack City."

"Lots of fellows are heading that way, I understand." Jeff had heard—as had everyone in the Mormon capital—of John White's discovery of placer gold on Grasshopper Creek and the swift rise of the camp which already was eclipsing the brief fame of the Salmon River mines. At the moment there were more important things on Jeff's mind than the plans of a drunken bullwhacker. "Do you know an officer named Clarke out at the camp, Bill?"

"Two of 'em. There's Lootenant Clark in th' Second Cavalry Regiment an' a Major Clarke—he's damn p'ticular 'bout spellin' it with an E on th' end—that's a reg'lar army man."

"That's the one I mean. He rides a bay stallion."

"Yep. Bought it from a Piegan Injun at Fort Bridger, an' he don't think no more of it than he does of his right eye."

"Well, that horse—the bay stud—is mine. The Injuns stole it from me on Sublette's Cutoff."

Fairweather roared with laughter.

"T'd shore like t' see th' major's face when you tell him that. He's from Virginia, Major Clarke is, an' he says that's th' only hoss he's found west of Saint Joe that's fit fr a gentleman t'

ride. He didn't come from Churchill with th' Volunteers, y' know. He's from one of the posts on th' Platte an' j'ined up with us here."

He's from Virginia . . . from Virginia . . . Virginia. Of course he knows horseflesh.

"I've already told him about it, and he told me to come out to the camp day after tomorrow. He's busy tomorrow, he said."

"Yep. I heard he come out here t' round up deserters from th' forts on th' Platte. This country's full of 'em, an' now there's sojers here they figger on ketchin' up with 'em an' draggin' 'em 'fore a military court an' shippin' 'em back east t' git shot. Feller from B Company of th' First that's been actin' orderly f'r th' major was over t' our camp playin' cyards last night, an' he said th' major was gunnin' f'r two Confedrit captains that was here. If he c'd ketch 'em he'd ship 'em east with th' others. Th' rebs, he said, was mighty glad t' git deserters. Likely they'd swap a colonel 'r mebbe even a gen'ral f'r them two captains."

Confederate deserters . . . that's what I am . . . and he's one of the Virginia Clarkes. I won't be taken. I've heard that in both armies they send deserters to special companies and keep them in the front lines until they're killed. Major Clarke looked mighty funny at me when I told him my name. Maybe he knows about me. I won't see him again. I won't go near that camp. I'll get out of here tonight—no, I've got to wait till tomorrow. I'll go to California, and I'll find Ann. Maybe I'll change my name. No, I can't. She knows I'm Jeff Crittenden. I'm Jeff Crittenden, but, Lordy, I'm not the same Jeff Crittenden she crossed th' plains with. I've got t' keep my head. I wish that Fairweather would keep quiet for a minute.

"Hey, whut's th' matter with you, Jeff?" Fairweather demanded. "I jest made you a proposition, an' all you do is stare at th' wall like a hoot owl."

"I—I guess I didn't hear you, Bill. I was thinking about something else—about my horse."

"I was tellin' you 'bout th' Beaverhead country. I met a feller t'day that's just come down from there an' is goin' back with a

load of stuff. He says Grasshopper Creek—that's Bannack—is jest a flash camp. It looked like the real stuff when a feller named White made th' strike last summer, but th' gold's spotty an' all th' bars are staked. There ain't a gulch in th' mountains, he says, where you don't stand a good chance of turnin' up color, an' th' country ain't crowded, like Californy. Let's go up there, you an' me? I got 'nough money f'r a stake, an' I reckon you c'n raise one. We'll go t' Bannack an' then head up north 'r over toward th' Yellowstone headwaters, an' we'll make a strike!"

Jeff shook his head.

"I'm no miner, Bill. I don't know a thing about prospecting."

"Y' c'n shovel sand out of a crick bed, can't yuh?" Fairweather demanded. "I'll show yuh where t' dig. I know quartz rock when I see it, an' I know what kind o' rocks t' look for. I've made a dozen prospectin' trips, one time an' another. Up above th' head of th' Platte, on th' Powder an' th' Bighorn, an' out from Fort Union. Didn't find nothin', but that wasn't our fault 'r th' fault of th' country. It was Injuns. That's all Sioux country, an' th' Sioux run us out every time. I c'n talk Sioux—some. Learned it when I was workin' at Fort Union. 'Nother thing—I'll bet y' thet when we git t' Bannack we'll meet up with a plenty of fellers I know. Fellers from Californy an' th' Oregon country an' th' Platte. News of th' strike on th' Beaverhead will draw 'em like spilled sugar does flies."

"No. I'm—I'm set on going to California, Bill."

The liquor Fairweather had consumed jolted his brain to a mild anger.

"Go there, then. Go take a job carryin' 'dobe bricks f'r a house builder. I don't care. Ask me on yore bended knees f'r th' name of my friend from th' Beaverhead, an' I'll tell yuh t' go t' hell. I'm offerin' yuh a chance at gold, an' y're choosin' th' silk hats an' plush pants in Californy. Yo're like a Novy Scoshy dog that'll eat fish if he's got t' kill a dozen cows t' git it. Go on—ask me th' name of my friend!"

Jeff did not put the question. He left the table, nodded to the bartender, to whom—since he did not drink, gamble, or

work—he was something of a mysterious figure, and walked out of the saloon. He did not hear what Bill Fairweather shouted after him.

"Clem Talbot—that's th' feller's name. Clem Talbot."

4

I'll get out. I don't know why I've stayed here so long, anyway. Ann and her father have gone on to California, and it's there I'll find them. I'll go out over the Spanish Trail—like that fellow said to—and take my time working north from Los Angeles Pueblo. I've got plenty of money—or have I? I might . . .

It's not stealing. It's—it's kinda borrowing, like Mr. 'Dolph Tatum, who's gentry and poor, used to borrow from his cousin, Major Luke, who's rich. Major Luke's nigger told one of the Sutry niggers who told Duke Sutry, and I heard Duke laugh about it to Harry Saymore, about how there was a whole wad of 'Dolph's promissory notes in the drawer of Major Luke's desk. Fellows with a big roll of money haven't any business to get drunk and go to sleep in the gutter or up alleys. If I didn't take it the first one of these Mormons that came along would stick it in his pocket and laugh about it. They think it's smart to pull a trick like that on a Gentile. They call it milkin' 'em, milkin' the Gentiles. I'll take a look in that Alta Saloon on the State Road near the theater . . .

Ann wouldn't look at it like that. She'd call it stealing, just plain stealing. Maybe it is—but she'll never know.

5

He bought beer and drank it slowly at a side table. The big man at the bar wasn't drunk; but he was buying drinks for all those who stood near him, and men who had reached so expansive a mood weren't sober long. He had money, too, in a belt around his waist. Jeff had felt it when he'd pretended to slip on the sawdust-sprinkled floor and had clutched at the big man's body. The man hadn't been suspicious. He'd grabbed Jeff's elbow and told him to look out, and Jeff had apologized and

insisted on buying a drink to atone for his clumsiness. He hadn't tried to force himself on the fellow, either; just paid for the whisky the man ordered and then retired to the side table.

The man filled his glass but left it standing on the bar. He walked to the rear of the room and vanished through the door which opened on the back yard. When he returned he stood in the doorway for a moment, then walked directly to the table where Jeff sat alone.

"Friend," he said, "my name's Peters, Lew Peters. A couple of minutes ago, when we were talking, I sized you up as the kind of fellow that'd give a straight answer to a straight question. I'm a stranger here—got in on the stage from the east this afternoon and figured I'd lay over a few days and look the place over. You're not one of these here Mormons we hear so much about, are you?"

"I had a drink with you, didn't I?" Jeff asked. "That's the answer. Mormons aren't supposed to drink, and you won't often find them in places like this. I'm a Gentile, all right."

"That's good—and I'm asking you now if you've been around here long enough to know the ropes or if you're a stranger like me?"

"I've been here since summer—plenty long enough to know my way round."

"Fine. Listen, friend; where can a fellow find"—he dropped his voice to a hoarse whisper—"where can a fellow find a woman round here?"

Jeff chuckled.

"You're a stranger, all right. All you've got to do is walk a block west, cross Main Street, and—"

"Oh, I know that. That's the Line over there. A fellow that came down on the stage from Fort Bridger has been talking about it all the way.

"Lines are the same everywhere. I've been down 'em in Chicago and Saint Looey and all over. I'm not looking for any Line girl. I'd like to find a nice little woman that ain't up to all the Line-girl tricks—a little woman that a fellow could talk

to and drink a bottle of wine with, maybe, and that'd not be too proud to be friendly with a fellow that'd leave her a nice present. I've heard it said that some of these Mormon women—"

"That's different." A plan was forming in Jeff's brain as he simulated hesitation. "If you'd lived here a while, pardner, you'd know that fellows aren't in any hurry to talk about such things with strangers. It can be dangerous."

"I told you my name, didn't I? It's Lew Peters, and I'm from Philadelphia, bound for San Francisco to make some contracts for shipments from China. You looked to me like a gen'leman, so I thought . . ."

He's not drunk, but he's a long way from sober. "That's all right, Mr. Peters. A man wants to be sure who he's talking with—you can understand that, can't you?"

"Sure—that's just good sense. I'd do the same thing myself."

"Good." *This was too easy.* "I can see you're a gentleman too, Mr. Peters, and maybe I can help you out. I can't make any promises—this lady I'm thinking about isn't one of the Line girls—but it just happens I know a little lady who lives over near the Old Fort." *He doesn't know where the Old Fort is. I can walk him anywhere.* "She's a Mormon; but her husband's on a mission to England, and she's not only lonely but she finds it pretty hard to get along. Living is high out here, and some of these elders don't care how they leave plural wives to scabble along the best they can. She'd appreciate any little present—"

"Lew Peters may have his faults, but nobody can say he isn't generous when he's treated right." The man slapped his breast-pocket as a gesture of unlimited wealth. *If you're as big a fool as that how did you get even as far as St. Joe without being robbed?*

"She'll treat you right. Do you know any of those fellows you were drinking with at the bar?"

"Not a one."

"I'll leave now. You go up and finish that drink you left there—take your time about it—and then say something to the bartender about going back to the hotel. Turn to your left when you

leave, and I'll be waiting for you on the next corner. Understand?"

"Sure."

It was too easy. No one saw Peters meet him or followed them as they walked to Seventh Street South and then turned eastward. It was easy to override Peters's suggestion that they hire a hack—"and have every old busybody in the neighborhood talking about it? She'd never even come to the door when we knocked"—and no more difficult to describe the lonely and entirely nonexistent plural wife as the most desirable of clandestine companions. A late moon, waning into its last quarter, lighted the streets too brightly, but it was all the darker by comparison under the shadow of the cottonwoods.

"It's right around the next corner, Peters. You wait here, under this tree, and I'll go round and tell her what to expect."

He made a slow circuit of the block. Not all of the lots in the blocks toward the edge of the city had been apportioned. The houses were more scattered, and each one set well back from the dirt road. All were darkened. He saw no one and heard nothing except a sleepy bark from a dog on a porch. Peters had not stirred from under a tree.

"Is it all fixed?" the man asked eagerly.

"It sure is." Jeff slipped the long Colt from its holster and jammed it lightly into the other's belly. "Just get your hands up, pardner—'way up—and there won't be a bit of trouble. I don't want to hurt you, but . . ."

Many of the leaves had fallen from the cottonwoods, and the moonlight, shining through the half-stripped branches, fell directly on Peters's face. Jeff almost laughed at the expression of surprise, silly surprise, that swept over his features. Then, as the muzzle of the Colt prodded him, the surprise was swept away by wide-eyed terror.

"Bu—bu—bu—" he stammered.

"I'll do the talking. You keep your hands up and your mouth shut!"

"Behind you!" Peters shrieked. Jeff did not turn his head.

"None of that game," he snarled angrily. He raised the Colt and flipped the muzzle back over his shoulder. *Should've done it in the first place. Knock him out and he can't holler.* He tightened his grip on the square butt, but the blow did not fall. Long fingers gripped the gun barrel and wrenched the weapon from his grasp so suddenly as almost to break his finger. A hand gripped his coat collar and scarf, twisting until he gasped. Then he felt the gun—his own gun—in the small of his back.

"Don't move!"

The low-pitched voice was deadly. Jeff Crittenden did not move. Peters, facing him, slowly lowered his hands, and a more normal expression returned to his face.

"He tried to hold me up," he said.

"I saw it. I was sitting on the porch yonder, in the dark, and I saw the two of you walking past. When he left you I thought the two of you were planning to rob one of these houses, so I came down to the edge of the grass."

"He—he got me 'way out here under a pretext," said Peters slowly. "Do you want me to help you tie him up, mister?"

"No; it won't be necessary." The voice seemed drained of all emotion. Jeff could not tell whether the speaker was young or old, a strong man or a weakling whom he could subdue if he wheeled quickly and seized the gun.

"I—I guess I'll be going then," said Peters. The other did not answer, but Peters turned and broke into a hurried trot in the direction of the city. Jeff Crittenden licked his dry lips and tried to swallow. The man behind him did not move. *He's waiting for me to say something. I won't do it. I'll wait; I'll wait for him to speak first.*

"Walk straight ahead," said the stranger at last, "and when you come to the gate turn in and go up to the porch. If you make a break I'll shoot—remember that. I want to talk to you."

Jeff obeyed. He linked one thumb with the other and rested his hands upon the flat crown of his hat. The strange, cold voice sounded tired, he thought, and he felt more confident. Peters was gone and could not be called upon to refute any statements Jeff might make. There might be a chance of talking himself

out of this mess. He climbed the two low steps to the porch and—at a low-voiced command from his captor—sat down in one of the splint-bottomed chairs there. The stranger remained standing. Only his feet and the lower portion of his legs were in the moonlight which lay like spilled silver on the boards.

"This is Brother Smith's home," said the man at last. "He and Sister Lucile have gone to Provo where their daughter is expecting a child. I am alone here."

"There are a good many Smiths in Great Salt Lake City," remarked Jeff. The man had paused as though expecting a reply, and Jeff was not yet ready to attempt an explanation of the attempt at robbery.

"Brother Abner Smith." The man cleared his throat. "I got a good look at the man you tried to rob. He is a stranger here—a Gentile, but a stranger in our midst—and you tried to rob him. It is men like you who bring disgrace to Latter Day Saints everywhere."

"I'm not a Saint." For an instant he thought of claiming membership in the church and demanding that the other protect him, then realized that the briefest of catechisms would reveal the falsehood.

"Oh. Step out here in the moonlight. I want to get a look at you."

Jeff descended the steps and stood with his face upturned toward the other, whose features were still invisible in the shadow.

"You don't look like a robber—"

"I'm not!"

"And you're well dressed. You look like a gambler."

As the word fell upon his ears hope rose singingly in Jeff Crittenden's heart. A story came to his brain, a frame of clever falsehood to which the circumstances as his captor had observed them could be fitted.

"And you're wrong there, too," he said boldly. "I'm not a gambler either. It was my trying to be a gambler that got me here."

"I don't understand."

"Maybe you will when I'm through." Unbidden, he resumed his seat on the porch. "Can I put my hands down, pardner? I haven't got another gun—you can search me if you want to—and my arms are near broke."

"All right, but no—no funny business."

"There won't be any. My name's Crittenden, mister. I've been in the city a couple of months, and I'm living at Bishop Gregg's—you can ask the bishop about me, and you can't find anybody in town that can say they ever saw me gambling or drinking more'n a little beer or ever hanging around those places on First West Street. I'm not that kind of a Gentile."

He paused. The other said, "Go ahead," and it seemed to Jeff that his voice held more than a shade of interest.

"A man like that gets lonely here, mister. He'll talk to strangers, and he won't stop to think that he might get into trouble. That was the way it was with me. I run into that fellow in the Alta Saloon near the theater. He said his name was Peters and that he'd just got in from the east. When I said I was heading for California in a day or so—"

"You're going to California?"

"Yes, sir. I've got one hoss on pasture in Little Cottonwood, and I'm dickering for another. I'd have been gone before now, I reckon, if it hadn't been for that. You can't hurry a hoss-trade too much."

"I— Never mind. Go on with your story."

"Sure. This Peters, he let on he was interested. He wanted to know 'bout the stage road and the Southern Road to Los Angeles and whether the desert from the Beaverdams to the Vegas Springs was as bad as he'd heard tell. He's no stranger out here—I know that now, just as I'll bet he's known by a dozen names other than Peters. I know that just like I know he's a pretty slick gambler. I didn't think anything of it when he got out a deck of cards and said we'd cut the deck to see who'd pay for a couple of glasses of beer. I won; and I won when he cut again for two bits and then for four bits and a dollar.

"That's how it started, but it ended with him making a cut and winning two hundred dollars from me—money I sure

needed if I was going to California. It was then that I noticed a fellow standing at the bar that I'd seen round town, and he went out the back door to the yard and made signs like I was to follow him. I told Peters I wanted to go to the water closet but for him to wait and give me a chance to get my money back. This fellow—"

"What's his name?"

"Fairweather. He's driving a freight wagon up to the Beaver-head diggings. He told me that he'd been watching the game and that Peters had been cheating me right along. He had a slick-card deck, Fairweather said, and he could cut an ace every time he wanted to. He said I'd better quit and let my losses be a lesson to me—but I'm not the kind to sit still and let myself be robbed. I wanted my money back, and I talked mighty friendly to Peters—or whatever his name is—and I made up an excuse to get him away from the Alta and out here where I thought everything would be quiet and all the folks in bed. Then I held him up—"

"Wait a minute. You left him standing under that tree while you walked around the block. Why?"

"So he wouldn't be suspicious of me. I didn't know if he had a gun or not, and I didn't want to give him a chance to derringer me. What I told him—I know you won't like this, mister, but I've got to tell you the whole truth—what I told him was that a couple of plurals lived out here whose husband was away on a mission and who'd be mighty glad to see us. I walked round the block so he'd think I was making sure it was all right to go to the house. Then I held him up. I'll admit it, and you can have me sent to jail for it if you want to—but all I was after was just what he'd robbed me of. I wasn't going to touch another cent."

The other man carefully lowered the hammer of the revolver. Jeff said nothing.

"You—you sound honest," said the man at last. "I wish I could hear Peters's side of the story."

"I'll help you find him." Jeff tried to speak eagerly. "You can bring Burton, the police chief, with you and judge for your-

self which one of us is telling the truth. Maybe I'd have a chance of getting my money back then."

"No. I think I'll believe you. Here's your gun"—he extended the weapon toward Jeff but retained his hold on the barrel—

"You can have it if you'll promise to let Peters alone. Don't go near him."

"I give you my word on that. This'll be a lesson to me." Jeff's humility was not entirely assumed.

"And the money. Let that be a lesson to you, too. How much did you say it was?"

"Two hundred dollars." Jeff took the weapon and returned it to the holster. *God, that makes me feel better!*

"Not a small sum—and you say you needed it badly. How would you like to make two hundred dollars?"

"I sure would!" Jeff exclaimed, then added virtuously: "so long as it's honest."

"It's honest," said the man slowly. "You say you're going to California. You say you're buying horses for your trip. I'll give you two hundred dollars if you take me with you and say nothing to anyone about my going."

Jeff Crittenden had not lived in Great Salt Lake City for two months without learning something of internal politics. There was no need for humility now. It was his turn to listen; this stranger's to talk. He took a cheroot from his vest pocket and scratched a match on the sole of his boot. As the sulphur sputtered into flame he saw a pale, sensitive face, wide blue eyes, and a fringe of soft beard that enclosed the firm chin. That beard and the shaven upper lip told Jeff a great deal.

"We've been talkin' for some time," he said, "and I don't know your name yet."

"Thomas Medbridge—Elder Thomas Medbridge."

"And you want to get to California—without anybody knowin' about it?"

"Yes."

"I've been around here long enough to know what that means, elder. It means you're clearin' out—apostatizin' out of the church."

"No! No!" Medbridge declared passionately. "I am a Latter Day Saint, and I will always be one. I believe in the Prophet Joseph Smith and in the gospel of his revelations—"

"But you're clearin' out of Utah just the same. Brigham Young and Heber Kimball would call it apostatizin', elder." It was no longer the frightened Jeff Crittenden who spoke. He was again the Fort Hall trapper, the man of cool brain and salty speech. "If I'm goin' to do anything for you, elder—and I've not made any promises—you'd best tell me what's wrong."

"I will try to tell you. Maybe you—a Gentile—will understand. I have been a Mormon, as you call us, for ten years, but I have been in Great Salt Lake City only since last summer. Until I got here I had never seen polygamy. I—I cannot deny a doctrine of my church, but I cannot accept polygamy for myself. And now Brother Brigham—President Young—wishes me to enter into a polygamous marriage."

Jeff Crittenden smothered a chuckle.

"And your wife won't stand for it—is that what it boils down to, elder? What's going to happen to her if you run off to California?"

"I have never married. The only woman I ever wished to marry was a Gentile, and she would not even think of becoming a Saint. President Young has ordered me—that's what it amounts to—ordered me to marry two women who came with us from England as converts. He proposes that I marry them on the same day—one in the morning, the other in the afternoon—and that is **bestial!**"

His deep voice boomed like a chord in G on the strings of a harp.

"I've heard of things like that," said Jeff calmly. "How do the girls feel about it—willin'?"

"Yes. They are both strong in the faith. They were in Brother Carrington's office—he is Brother Brigham's secretary—when I was called there. I talked with them both."

He rose and paced the length of the porch. Jeff puffed at his cheroot and flicked the white ash over the low rail. *These Mormons and their women! Old bucks strutting round with*

three or four women following them for all the world like barn-yard cocks with their hens. Brigham was credited with twenty-two by fellows who said they knew what they were talking about, but some Gentiles claimed that there were hundreds of women in Utah that could tell whether or not the president of the church snored. And that old stud-buzzard Heber Kimball had more than forty wives—and admitted it. He'd be stepping some to make the rounds once in six weeks. Sounds good, but I don't want any of it. The women are worse than the men. They fight like hell among themselves—just look at Vogt's three wives—but there wouldn't be a damned one of them give up polygamy if they had a chance. Even if the Gover'ment started prosecutions—like there was talk of doing—you wouldn't find one of those plurals who'd go on the stand against her husband. Maybe it was religion that did it, maybe it was just that women couldn't help loving a man they'd slept with, no matter what happened, but that was the way of it. Old Brigham sure must want to break this young fellow Medbridge, asking him to marry two women in one day. It just wasn't natural. That's his hard luck, though. I've got Jeff Crittenden to look out for, and I'm not takin' on anybody else's troubles—'specially when it might mean that old Port Rockwell or some other one of those Danites would be layin' for me. I don't want to be found out in the sagebrush with a bullet through me or with my throat cut, or maybe gelded like that fellow they tell about down in Springville. Wasn't it just my luck to pick the one spot in all Salt Lake City where this Medbridge was settin' on the porch moonin' over his troubles. I'd have a sockful of cash if it hadn't been for him.

His cheroot had gone out. He tossed the stub away and lighted another. Medbridge had resumed his seat.

"I've been thinking, elder. I owe you something—plenty of men wouldn't even have listened to me tonight—and I want to help you. I'm trying to think of you and the chances you're taking. I'd figured on taking the Southern Road to San Gabriel and Los Angeles, but if we go that way we'll be passing through Mormon towns for three hundred miles. The Overland Route

is safer than that, but either there or along the Humboldt we could be caught up with by anybody that suspected you were trying to make a getaway. I think I've got a better idea."

"What is it?"

"It's to go north. If they missed you they'd suspect the California roads first of all and then the road east, but they'd never suspect anybody trying to get away would head north across Snake River. This fellow Fairweather I told you about is leaving in a day or two for the Beaverhead. He'd take you with him if you made it worth his while. You could winter up there and then, with spring, you could go out either to Oregon or back east with some freight outfit. The Danites would have forgot you by then."

"Yes. And you think this Fairweather would be willing that I should go—in his wagon?"

"You offered me two hundred dollars. From what I've seen of Bill Fairweather he'd drive you through hell for half that."

"I'm not a rich man, but I'm not exactly poor either. I haven't turned over everything I own to the church like—like some people have. Wait."

Medbridge hurried into the house. When he returned he pressed five double eagles into Jeff's hand.

"There's a hundred dollars. Give that to him and tell him that I'll pay him as much more when we arrive safely in Bannack City."

6

The moon had set, and as Jeff walked through the dark streets toward Bishop Gregg's home the air held the cool, frosty scent of autumn dawn. *He's just as big a fool, only in a different way, as that Peters was. He's either a fool or he's scared enough to do anything, or he wouldn't have stuck a hundred dollars in my hand and let me go like that. Plenty of fellows would have thrown a gun on him right then and taken all he had. I'm sorry for him. Tomorrow, after I've got my horse from Little Cottonwood and bought some things I need, damn' if I don't try to find Bill and that freighter and tell 'em about that Medbridge.*

Maybe I'll even give the freighter twenty dollars. I need a pair of spurs. I think I'll buy those big California spurs with all the silver on 'em that're in the Walker Emporium window. I've got t' pay old Gregg, too. Maybe ten dollars 'll look pretty big to that freighter fellow—I wish I'd asked Bill Fairweather what his name was. . . .

He slept until roused by the clatter of pans as the bishop's first wife prepared breakfast. He did not ask where the bishop was. Sister Mary, the second wife, thirty years the first's junior, was housed around the corner, and it was her task, usually, to prepare breakfast for the mutual husband.

He stopped at the Colorado Stables and sent a boy for the horse pastured at Little Cottonwood. The freighters, he knew, were to be found at Tophonce's and the other corrals toward the northern end of the city off the State Road, and he'd probably locate Bill Fairweather and his unknown friend there. Jeff paused at the corner of Temple and Main Streets. It was still pretty early, and he had all day to find Fairweather. He'd buy a hat first, one of the new gray beavers with a broad brim. Maybe the spurs, too—and he turned south on Main Street. As he passed the Livingstone store he met the man Peters face to face. At Peters's side was Burton, chief of the Great Salt Lake City police.

"There he is! That's him now!" Peters shrieked. "That's the man who robbed me last night—arrest him!"

7

At the trial, Peters declared that all the gold and greenbacks found in the belt about Jeff's waist had been stolen from him. A bartender from the Alta California testified that he had seen the two men in conversation, that they had left the saloon within a few minutes of one another, and that Peters had returned some time later—disheveled and bruised—and said that the man he had been talking with had lured him to a distant section of the city and robbed him.

Bishop Gregg appeared reluctantly as a witness for the defendant. He could say only that Jeff had boarded in his home,

and paid his bills promptly, had seemed always to be well supplied with money, and had no visible means of support.

The jury chose to believe Peters and declared Jeff guilty of robbery with arms on the highway. The judge sentenced him to eighteen months in the territorial penitentiary, which had been completed a few years before in the Sugar House Ward. The Mormons were quite proud of that prison. Some said it was entirely too good for the Gentiles and Indians who, to date, had been the only prisoners confined there.

II. ANN MINOR

Chapter XIII

I

CLEM TALBOT—when Bill Fairweather met him at Aleck Taper's corral north of the Tithing House—was on the first of many trips he was to make between Great Salt Lake City and the region which was to become known as the Beaverhead District. Neither he nor Jesse Minor had ever heard of the Beaverhead River, the stream which Lewis and Clark had named the Jefferson, when they camped on the north bank of Snake River and repacked the wagon for the westward journey to Fort Boisé and the new gold discoveries near the headwaters of the Salmon. The chance of a loose tire which Clem wanted to heat and shrink more tightly on a wheel decided their course. While that tire was heating a horse man rode from the east and shouted for the ferryman. Jesse Minor talked with the stranger and learned of the discovery, then less than two weeks old, of the rich diggings on Grasshopper Creek, one of the upper tributaries of the Beaverhead. More, he saw samples of the nuggets which the stranger carried and was told that already men were deserting the Salmon River diggings and rushing to the new discovery, the

richest which the West had known since the first boom at Comstock Lode.

"That's enough for me," said Jesse Minor after the man had crossed to the south bank. "It's closer than the Salmon, it's a heap easier to get to, and it's newer. A new strike is always a good gamble. We'll go there."

Their course was eastward for some miles along Snake River, then north past the Three Buttes and through the pass which in later years was to be called Monida. When they reached Grasshopper Creek the straggling settlement of tents and wicki-ups was already being called Bannack City—an Americanization of the word Panáit, the name of the Shoshonean subtribe which inhabited the area. Jesse Minor built the first cabin to be erected at the scene of John White's strike. It was the first and for more than a year would be the largest cabin in the town: a cabin with two bedrooms—real rooms with doors and not just bunks along the walls with calico curtains as pretenses of privacy. Bannack City had seen nothing like it, and Jesse's construction was interpreted as a shrewd man's faith in the camp's permanence. But there was to be more to that house than two bedrooms and a clapboarded roof, instead of mud and chopped straw, and floors that were neither puncheons nor hard-packed clay but solidly planked with whipsawed lumber at thirty cents the board foot. Jesse Minor had a wife, and his wife wanted other things.

"Bedsteads, Clem," she said. "I've been sleeping on the ground or in a wagon ever since we left St. Joseph, and now I want a bed that I can put my feather mattress on. And a cooking range. I don't care if you have to go all the way back to St. Louis or west to San Francisco—don't come back without a cooking range."

"That's right," Jesse Minor agreed. "Winter's just over the hill, and I won't have my wife squatting over the coals like an Assiniboine squaw. You ought to be able to pick up some chairs, too, Clem, and maybe a couple of chests of drawers."

He opened the lower button of his shirt to reach the money belt that was buckled around his body.

"No, Jesse, I want to furnish my own house." There was nothing in her voice to indicate the rift that had been between them ever since that morning at Sheep Rock, nothing to reveal her hatred of his money and the method by which he made it. "I'll give Clem a draft on Wells-Fargo for—how much do you think he'll need?"

"Plenty. Why send him on a round trip of a thousand miles to bring back a third of a load? Let him buy some more bulls and load the wagon to the top of the bows and make some money."

"I don't understand, Jesse." They were standing a few yards from the half-built cabin. A dozen squaws were bearing clay from the creek and, giggling and chattering as only Indian women can, were puddling it into a frost-proof base between the mudsills and the floor-joists. Jesse waved his hand toward the tents and dugouts of the town.

"There's close to a thousand men round here," he said, "and more are coming every day. Women, too. Right now they're all either digging gold or looking for places to dig, and they're scattered everywhere from Horse Prairie to the Big Hole and Deer Lodge. We'll see frost in another month, though, and then they'll all start at once to hole up for the winter. They'll want cabins—certainly those that have women will—and that means they'll want hammers and saws and auger bits and nails. Nails will be scarcer than nuggets. They'll be hungry, too. They'll want flour and raisins and dried fruit and all the grub they can get. Bacon. Window lights. Clothes. Everything. Dammit, Ann, don't be a piddler. If you're going to make a freighter out of Clem, give him a chance to be a real one."

It ended with the three of them squatting on the ground while Jesse, with a bit of board for a desk, wrote lists of materials and quantities and weights and outlined plans by which Ann could sell outright to Clem her oxen and wagon, advance him funds for working capital, and consider the whole as the formation of a company in which Clem would be the working partner, she the financial. Jesse had seen fortunes made in California by men who hauled supplies from Sacramento to

the mining district of the Washoe Valley. Sack flour doubled in value in crossing the Sierras; nails, bought by the keg, were sold by count, and the owner of a dozen old saddles need only wait for rumors of a new strike to sell them at his own price.

"Clem's a trader," said Jesse, "or I've missed every guess I ever made, so give him a chance to trade. Gamble, my dear, gamble. Shove your money across the board and gamble a couple of hundred per cent return against the chance this camp might blow up and leave you with a shed full of stuff you couldn't give away."

"Do you mean you think this camp is going to blow up?" she asked quickly.

"Always cautious, aren't you?" her husband jeered lightly. "I'm gambling, too—gambling a house against the chances of the camp busting. You gambled once, Ann, when you married me, so gamble again. If you want to play safe—hell, I'll take a third of the Talbot-Minor Company."

"No." It was enough to know that some of the money won from Clem Talbot and from the red-bearded emigrant was building the house in which she would live. "I'll draw on Wells-Fargo for—will five thousand dollars be enough, Jesse? I'll give it to Clem, and he can collect it in Great Salt Lake City."

Clem Talbot, whittling a chunk from his plug, narrowly avoided amputating half his thumb. Jesse did not seem particularly impressed.

"That ought to start it," he said at last. "Make a list of what you think you've got to have for this house—there'll be no profit in that—and let Clem figure how much other space he'll have in the wagon. Get around, Clem, and find out what's scarcest here."

"T'baccy," said Clem promptly. "Right now there ain't fifty pounds of smokin' in all Bannack. Tools 're skeerce, too. This mornin' a feller offered me ten dollars f'r th' maul an' froe I was rivin' shingle boards with."

"There's a start. I'll bet you'll wind up by buying a trailer and putting six or eight yoke of bulls on the two wagons and hiring a couple of fellows to help you with the outfit."

"One good man'll be plenty, 'specially with bulls," Clem vol-

unteered. "Bulls are slower 'n mules, but they ain't half th' trouble on th' road. Nothin' stampedes 'em, and yuh don't have t' chase 'em from hell t' breakfast an' back agin when time comes t' ketch up. I'll stick t' bulls an' one man."

Thus was born the transport organization which eventually gave employment to hundreds of men and which counted its horses, mules, and oxen by thousands. The name of Talbot & Minor was known from the Canadian Border to the Black Hills, and miners whose lives depended on the arrival of the wagon trains spoke enviously of the luck which followed Jesse Minor's trail. Not until the railroad came to the northwest and the original owners sold their holdings was it known that Ann Minor had become wealthy on the return from that investment and that Jesse had had nothing to do with the concern. From the beginning to the end it was Clem Talbot and Ann Minor, and the first employee was the red-bearded Bill Fairweather, hired by Clem on his first trip.

2

"Yuh claim yuh c'n handle bulls," Clem said. "I'll know if yo're lyin' 'fore we git t' Centerville. Yuh c'n work yore passage t' Bannack City, an' if I think y're wuth it when we git thar I'll pay y' ten dollars. Take it 'r leave it. A dozen jaspers 've been lookin' f'r th' chance, an' all of 'em claim they was born in th' box of a bull wagon."

"You've sold a hoss, pardner. Grub an' t'baccy an' ten dollars when we git t' Bannack. Gold—not these here Union frogskins that nobody wants less'n they discount 'em. It's better'n four hundred miles, ain't it? How many chances is there f'r a feller t' have him a drunk?"

"None f'r a man I'm bossin'," said Clem promptly. "Git drunk an' I'll rope yuh round th' heels an' drag yuh sober back o' th' wagon."

"Ain't you a son of a bitch, now!" Fairweather remarked mildly. Clem pointed to the letters T-M which he had stenciled within a red circle on the wagon canvas.

"See that there? Half of it's me, Clem Talbot. This here's

my outfit, an' I aim t' git her through right side up without fetchin' up in th' bottom of a gulch through bein' drunk. I'll buy yuh one drink in Ogden City an' one at th' Snake River Ferry an' two after th' teams 're in th' corral at Bannack City."

Fairweather permitted the thought of that generosity to penetrate his inner consciousness. Finally he dug into his pockets and counted sixty dollars into Clem's palm.

"I'll shore need that when we git t' Bannack. Now I'm broke 'cept fr what I'll eat up an' drink up 'fore we pull out. You keep that and don't give it to me, Clem, no matter how I beg fr it. You've got t' have stren'th enough t' tell me t' go t' hell."

"I'll kick yuh there if'n you git a skinful of rotgut," Clem promised. "Bill, this here's th' fust time I been my own boss since I was a little nipper pickin' shellbarks an' persimmons an' ped-dlin' 'em round so's I c'd buy me a knife like my big brother had. Ever since then I been takin' orders from somebody, an' I don't aim t' go back to it. Remember that."

"I'll never frgit it, pardner," said Bill Fairweather solemnly—and on the morning of their departure spent his last dollar for a pint of horrible whisky. He drank it while Talbot was busy with the many final details and was quite drunk when the big wagon and trailer swung out of Tapper's corral and turned westward toward the State Road. He could walk and talk; but his walk was a lurching stagger that threatened to precipitate him beneath the four-inch tires, and his talk consisted of ribald comments on the home life of the Latter Day Saints, addressed to those he passed, and of profane complaints that he was compelled by a cruci task-master to trudge beside the oxen rather than ride on the high seat of the wagon.

"I gotta goddam good mind t' quit ye, Clem," he grumbled. "There'll be plenty walkin' 'tween here an' th' Beaverhead—let's ride where th' road's good."

"Thar's no law agin quittin'. Gittin' shet of a damn drunk is good riddance." Clem popped the beautiful new bull whip, twenty feet from the shot-loaded butt to the silk tassel on the popper, which had been his one extravagant purchase. The

lash cracked like a rifle, and a woman who was scrubbing a near-by porch jumped nervously.

"Gimme m' money, then—I'm through." Fairweather halted in the road but was compelled to reel forward again as Clem passed him.

"In Bannack. I made a mistake on you, Bill. I figgered y' meant what y' said when y' gave me that money, an' I turned it over t' Wells-Fargo 'long with all my cash 'cept eatin' money an' ferry money. If I'd knowed you was jest a drunk I wouldn't 've done it. Now it's done. Y' can't git it till I cash me a draft, an' that'll be in Bannack."

There was no breeze, and the November sun was almost as hot as that of July. Eight yoke of oxen drew wagon and trailer. Sixty-four hooves and eight four-inch wheels churned the salt-bitter dust into a yellow cloud which moved steadily along with the caravan's slow progress. The men's sweat furrowed the dust, and new dust settled in the channels. Clem Talbot was nervous and exacting. Ogden City was only forty miles to the north, and any faults in his equipment, any omissions, any signs of weakness among the sixteen oxen, must be discovered before that settlement, with opportunities for repairs or replacements, lay behind them. He kept Bill moving from the lead oxen to the rear wheels of the trailer, checking for ill-fitting yokes that might result in galled necks and shoulders, listening for loose shoes, and examining tires and hubs and the linch pins.

"I tell ye I can't stand it." Fairweather moaned at last. "I know I don't deserve it, Clem, but I gotta ride f'r a spell 'r I'll drop right in here in th' road."

"Best edge over t' th' side, then," Talbot returned. "There's a heap of travel along here, an' ye mout git squashed as flat as thet horny-frog yonder."

"So that's yore breed, is it?" Fairweather yelped. "Jest a stinkin' Missouri puke, meaner'n a Digger Injun. I'm Old Bill Fairweather, an' I'll show ye I'm a better man than you be!"

"Nothin's stoppin' ye. Yo're 'bout half my age, young Bill, but I'll lay ye I'll walk them long legs of yores into raggedy stumps 'for we sight th' Bitterroots."

Fairweather did not reply to the challenge. He took his post at the off leader's shoulder—unless one man walked at the head of the eight yoke it was impossible to see approaching vehicles—and marched steadily through the rest of the day. The oxen had been fed before leaving the corral, and they made no halt for grazing. Bill was quite sober when they camped for the night between Farmington and Kaysville.

With the next day all of Talbot's hostility vanished. Bill Fairweather, sober and with a job to perform, was another individual than the drunken idler of Great Salt Lake City. He was awake before dawn and dug from the still-warm ashes of the campfire a metal canteen of coffee he had buried there the night before.

"Tain't what ye'd call red hot, Clem," he remarked, "but it'll take th' edge off till we stop f'r breakfast. Feller I worked with outa Fort Union showed me th' trick of usin' a army canteen with th' canvas ripped off an' bein' sure of a cup of coffee t' git th' day started on. Drink hearty."

Cattle will not graze while dew—even the scanty dew of the West—is on the grass. The men drank the lukewarm coffee, rolled their beds, and had the eight-yoke team under way before the sun had topped the Wasatch peaks. They halted at ten, fed the cattle grain from the supply they carried, and let them graze for three hours, then took up the drive until late in the afternoon. With the exception of the morning coffee the men ate only twice daily, once while the cattle grazed, again at night. On the trail, Bill Fairweather's wide-spaced eyes missed nothing. He was like a dog in that he could see to the side as well as he could straight ahead—swivel-eyed, he called it. He could identify a bird as far as he could see it in flight or could hear its note and could read in the dust of the road the record of the passing of every human, beast, or reptile. He took boyish delight in mystifying his older companion. Once, as the two walked together at the head of the team, Clem made passing comment that two horsemen had proceeded them along the road.

"Any fool c'd see that," Fairweather retorted. He said no more until they had covered a quarter mile. Then: "Two hosses,

Clem, but only one man. He's ridin' th' hoss an' leadin' a white mare thet's heavy in foal. Th' feller might be kinda old an' lame—leastways he's carryin' a pretty heavy stick."

"I'd give somethin'—I shore would—if I c'd make yuh prove that!" said the unbelieving Talbot. "Showin' off is safe—knowin' that anybody trav'lin' hossback would pull ahead of an ox team."

"Mebbe so, but I shouldn't wonder if we caught up with 'em pretty soon. They're not goin' far, I figger."

Clem only snorted.

"If I'm right," Fairweather persisted, "y' buy me two drinks 'stid of one at th' Snake River crossin'."

"Thet's a bet—but if y're wrong, gingy-whiskers, y' don't git any. Y'll stand with yore tongue hangin' out an' watch me drink 'em."

Within a mile they passed, a hundred feet from the road, the typical cabin of a Mormon settler. Tied to a rail beneath a cottonwood were two horses, one a saddled gelding, the other a white mare heavy in foal. An elderly man limped from the house and walked toward the horses. One foot was twisted awkwardly, and he supported himself with a stout cane.

"Two drinks!" said Bill Fairweather and smacked his lips. Clem Talbot said nothing more on the subject until after they had camped that night. Then, as they sat smoking by the dying fire, he demanded an explanation.

"You ain't no magician, an' those eyes of yores—good as they are—can't see round corners," he declared. "Jest tell me how ye done it."

"I used m' eyes, that's all. Th' tracks showed that one hoss was ridden an' that t'other one wasn't. A led hoss walks dif'rent—it puts its front foot off t' th' side it's gettin' pulled from—an' a mare that's 'bout ready t' drop her foal leaves a dif'rent track still. Th' hind feet 're spread a heap further than's nach'ral. When I seen a couple of white hairs caught outa her tail on a briery-bush I didn't have t' be told any more."

"All right. What about th' old man with a cane?"

"He'd busted down a couple of them sunflowers along th' side

of th' road. Y' c'd see where th' stick hit 'em—a squashed place near as wide as my two fingers. A switch 'r a quirt wouldn't hardly have busted them thick sunflower stalks at all."

"It might've been jest a boy carryin' a stick 'r a ox gad," Talbot suggested.

"It mighta been." Fairweather lit his pipe, then added. "It weren't."

"I reckon ye git yore drinks—but what made ye so shore th' feller wasn't goin' far?"

"Th' dog."

Talbot considered the point.

"There was some dog tracks—I remember seein' 'em now—but that don't mean nothin'."

"You saw th' dog tracks, an' yuh didn't see th' dog was goin' on three legs. He'd snagged himself on somethin'; once when he put his foot down he left a little spot of blood in th' dust. Reckon ye' think a old man, mebbe lame, with a mare in foal an' a sorefoot dog, w'd be goin' clear through t' th' Missouri River!"

"If I had any likker along, Bill," said Talbot, "I'd give yuh a snort right now." He could have paid no handsomer tribute, but he refused to be drawn into any more wagers with his companion. Clem Talbot was but one of many men who had traveled—or were destined to travel—the mountain trails with Bill Fairweather; one of many who would never know if the tall man with the red beard was a drunken sot and loud-mouthed braggart or if his lambent eyes were gifted beyond the ordinary limitations of human sight, his hairy ears attuned to sounds denied to common hearing. His name was to live in the land. Men would write of him, talk of him, throughout his life and long after his death—a drink-crazed pauper—in Pete Daley's tavern on the Stinking Water. There would be those who would call Bill Fairweather lucky—*any drunken bummer can be lucky. Luck's like lightning—God Himself don't know where it's going to hit, or who*—and others would ask themselves if his talk of gold in masses he could pick up in his two hands were not prophecy rather than drunken boasting.

He had just passed his twenty-sixth birthday in that autumn of 1862 when he journeyed to the Beaverhead with Clem Talbot, but he was "old Bill" Fairweather even then. "Old Bill" Fairweather. Old Bill to men who had ridden with Ashley and Jed Smith and the Sublettes; to men who had been paid for doing nothing by Bonneville and had ridden to California and the sea with Joe Walker; to men who scoffed at Frémont as an ignorant and timid little soldier boy who followed no new trails and who would have perished miserably except for men like Tom Fitzpatrick and Kit Carson and Alex Godey. Some of those men counted thrice Fairweather's years, but to them he was Old Bill. The plains and the mountains can bestow no higher title, no nobler decoration. The names and the fame of Old Jim Bridger and Old Caleb Greenwood and Old Bill Fairweather have survived where generals and colonels, judges and priests, scientists and geographers, have been long forgotten.

"I come from Canady," he told Clem Talbot in camp on the Portneuf, "an' most o' what I know 'bout th' woods an' trackin' I learned there. My pap took me huntin' moose an' shovelhorn caribou as soon as I was big enough t' wear pants. I helped him run bullets 'fore I could talk plain, an' I had my own trap line by th' time I was ten. If'n I couldn't tell pap what kind of critter made every track we crossed—an' what th' critter was doin' an' why he was doin' it—I tasted strap. He always had a chunk of harness-tug handy t' p'int his argyments. I was near fifteen years old when he heard up there 'bout gold bein' found in Californy, an' I argued with pap that I sh'd go there an' pick up some chunks of it. Pap won th' argyment—him an' th' harness-tug—but I made up my mind then that I'd come to th' mountains an' hunt gold jest as soon as I was stout enough to lick him."

"Since yo're here"—Clem stretched and scratched—"I take it yuh licked him."

"Yep. In '55. Pap throwed away his ax helve when he seen me standin' up with jest my two fists. After I'd clipped him fair three times he give me his blessin' an' twenty dollars. Fust time I knew there was that much money in th' world all in one piece."

He plucked a red coal from the fire with steady fingers and dropped it into the bowl of his pipe. The pipe was of soft red stone with a reed stem. A thread of sinew encircled the bowl, and strung on it were two small beads, red and blue.

"I've seen th' Platte an' th' Powder an' th' Big Horn," he said. "I've been t' th' boilin' springs under Pike's Peak where th' Arkansaw heads, an' I've been t' Californy. I aint found enough gold yet t' buy me a pair of boots, but I will. Yonder"—his long hand waved toward the north—"yonder is plenty country where no man's ever been. Th' gold is there f'r th' findin'."

"So they say," said Clem Talbot, "but I've heard that th' findin's apt t' be a mite difficult. Whut ye figger on doin' with all that gold when ye find it?"

"Hell, I jest want t' find it. Fust off, though, I reckon I'll have me th' biggest drunk that ever was."

"I reckon ye will," said Clem Talbot. "Don't let it slip yore mind that we got t' shoe Little Buck t'morrer."

3

The journey, to their minds, was eventless. They saw only interrupted sleep, not adventure, in the presence of wolves which howled hungrily at the scent of cooked meat; they cursed—and rather admired—a coyote who did not fear anything so inanimate as sleeping men and who stole a haunch of venison from within a few feet of their heads. Game, as a source of food to be relied upon, was virtually nonexistent south of the Snake; but when the road turned northward from that river and approached the Bitterroots they heard elk whistling in the hills, and both deer and antelope were plentiful. Bill had a pair of .44 caliber Colt revolvers which made the entire journey in the wagon box. He carried them, he said, only in Indian country, and since he could smell hostile Indians while they were yet a mile away there was no need to burden himself with the heavy guns. Clem suspected that the weapons had once belonged to one of the officers of the California Volunteers and that Bill did not care to discuss the manner by which they had come into his possession. Clem had with him a rifle which had been

owned by Peter Carmeny, and with it the two shot such game as they could obtain or required. Once they found the dry skull of a buffalo many years dead, and the incident made for long and speculative conversation as to why the buffalo which could still be counted in millions east of the Rockies and along the Missouri had vanished completely west of the mountains.

Nearly an entire day was required for the crossing of Snake River. Clem Talbot was superlatively cautious and unloaded half the contents of both the lead wagon and the trailer before risking either vehicle on the rude scow. He divided the oxen too, and crossed them in the ferry rather than swimming them behind the boat as was the practice of the majority of freighters. The ferryman, Brown, was being paid by the trip so did not express his low opinion of such excessive timidity. He was accustomed to men who loaded the scow to capacity and who laughed in midstream when the yellow waters lapped over the low sides. One was not loudly critical, however, of men like these two freighters. They'd been around, they had, and he'd seen the older one before. They weren't ignorant emmygrators who'd never been off a turnpike road until they left Saint Joe or Ioway City. At this stage of the water there wasn't a mite of danger—but he'd tell Sophie about that, not this feller Talbot.

Bill Fairweather crossed with the first load and remained on the north bank. Clem would have preferred to assume that duty and its responsibilities himself while Bill guarded the remaining wagon and the goods stacked beside it, but on the north bank Old Bill could get into no mischief. On the south bank was the ferryhouse with liquor in jugs and in bottles, and there was an Indian woman whose shoebutton eyes twinkled when Bill spoke a few words to her in some outlandish tongue.

"It was Sioux I was talkin'," Fairweather said that night in camp above the ferry landing. "She's Sioux an' comes from Fort Laramie, an' I'll bet I know a heap of her folks. I ain't talked Sioux f'r a long time—too bad we ain't got a boat."

He stared at the swift current.

"Yep, it's a damn shame," Clem agreed. "I reckon that feller over there w'd be mighty glad t' see yuh, too. He brung her all

th' way out here jest so's she'd have a chance t' sit an' chew th' rag with fellers that c'd talk her lingo. He'd likely git up an' give yuh half th' bed while he fixed up a tasty drink—then he'd shove a knife under y'r short ribs."

"Likely he would." Bill Fairweather grinned. "Some feller's 're funny that way. He didn't like it none when I made Dakota talk to her while we was drinkin'—I seen his face. Reckon I'd best give up any sech ideas."

The road followed the river for the course of a long day's drive, then turned northward toward Camas Prairie and the mountains. Beyond the pass were Red Rock Creek and Horse Prairie Creek and the streams which drained to the Beaverhead and the Missouri; Bannack City was less than a hundred miles away. Clem had not attempted to hurry, and the oxen had stood the trip well. On the sixteenth day after the departure from Great Salt Lake City the eight yoke slogged through a slushy snow which covered the divide between Horse Prairie Creek and Grasshopper. For the first time since leaving the Snake the two men smelled the smoke of fires other than their own.

"There she be!" Clem pointed with the butt of his whip. "By God, she's been a-growin' since I been away, too. She'll be a city yet, Bannack will."

4

Bannack City, as it was grandiloquently called, was less than six months old and had already eclipsed the tiny settlement on Deer Lodge Creek as the metropolis for all the vast region which lay between the Snake River and Canada, from Fort Benton on the Missouri westward to Fort Boisé and the Oregon settlements. It was a lonely land, known and yet almost unknown. Many men had followed its rivers since Merriwether Lewis and William Clark; a few had ventured to cross the divides which separated the streams. It had even been mapped, and on those maps the courses of the rivers and the location and direction of some of the mountain masses were shown with a very tolerable accuracy. Explorers, trappers, prospectors, soldiers, survey parties for the railroad which some day, it was hoped,

would span the continent—the land had known them all, but scarcely a score of them had remained. François Finlay, French-Canadian-Indian, had found gold on Beneetsee Creek. No great amount. Color that barely streaked the pan and then one nugget, as large as the top joint of a man's thumb, as an oriflamme to lead him to new hopes and despairs. A few men had seen Finlay's nugget and, lured thereby, had settled within a few miles' radius of one another in the Deer Lodge Valley. There were Johnny Grant, Granville and James Stuart, Bob Dempsey, John White, Ambrose LeGris, J. W. Powell, Charley Allen, the wild Irishman, Barney O'Keefe, Henry Brooks, Bob Pelky, Frank Woody, and another whom history knows only as Tin-cup Joe. Their number included squawmen and drifters and ne'er-dowells, good men and those of questionable reputation, and in that list are the names of virtually all those who were the first settlers of Montana. The pioneers were yet to come. The terms pioneer and first settler are not necessarily synonymous. Rarely have those hailed as pioneers been the first to view or to live upon new lands. Daniel Boone heard of the Kentuckee from John Finley and is honored in history which has forgotten his predecessor. Lewis and Clark were guided over much of their journey from St. Louis to the mouth of the Colombia by the French-Canadian, Toussaint Charbonneau, and his Shoshone wife, Sacajawea. William Henry Ashley and Andrew Henry listened to the tales of François Vallé and others, nameless, who had served Manuel Lisa and whose fathers had accompanied Pierre Vérendrye westward to the shining mountains in 1742. And as late as 1876, when the pioneers entered the Black Hills of South Dakota, there was found scratched on a stone the record of six whites and an Indian who had found gold there in 1834 and who had died on Lookout Mountain beneath a storm of Sioux arrows.

Mortimer Lott, Hiram Conley, and the Woods brothers ascended the north fork of the Salmon River, crossed the Bitter-roots, and found gold in paying quantities on the extreme headwaters of a stream which eventually reached the Big Hole River. News of the strike spread, and John White, searching for

Lott and his companions, made camp on Grasshopper Creek and idly turned a few pans of gravel on what he thought a likely looking bar. That accident revealed the richest strike made thus far in the Northwest. Lewiston and the Oro Fino region were deserted, and the prospectors who had been rushing for the Salmon and the Big-Hole headwaters turned southward to Grasshopper Creek and its tributary gulches. The gold deposits there were like many others in the West, rich but spotty. There was plenty of gold to draw men to the scene of White's discovery; enough to make a few lucky ones rich and enough to hold the less fortunate but no less hopeful in the region. The town grew. There were no houses, only the tents and the brush wickiups erected by those who did not possess tents, but it was "town" to the men who lived there and who used it as a base for prospecting operations further afield. There was dispute at first as to whether or not the creek was Rattlesnake, another tributary of the Beaverhead, and at first the town was known by that name. Then, for equally brief periods, it was Grasshopper and White's Bar, but the miners who came from Lewiston, then known as West Bannack, named the new location East Bannack. The geographical distinction was dropped, and the place became Bannack City or, more briefly, Bannack.

Mortimer Lott and Dave Dunkleberger abandoned their more northern claims and moved to the new town and began whipsawing lumber—at thirty cents the board foot—for the miners; A. J. Oliver pioneered an experimental trip with a stage line from Salt Lake City; two brothers named Woodmansee followed with freighters' wagons loaded with food and supplies; and the second stage to reach the settlement carried three women—"Madam" Woodley and two of her girls, veterans of Virginia City and Gold Hill in Nevada Territory and eager for a share in the wealth of the new town. She was told—by what guardian of public morals no one knows—to place her tents to the south of the town below the edge of the benchland known as Yankee Flat, and a second street came into existence there. Men who brought their wives and children to Bannack City selected sites to the north of Main Street which thus automatically be-

came the boundary between respectability and tolerated license. As the town aged, those who built their cabins to the north knew little and cared less about what went on in the dancehalls and saloons beyond the business street; the inmates and patrons of the hurdy-gurdys did not intrude themselves or their professions beyond the barrier. Thus simply are class distinctions and social cleavages created; there was a "wrong side of the tracks" long before the first locomotive shrieked the death song of the Indian and of the West, of the buffalo and the Mountain Men.

5

Bannack City had been growing. There was actually a sprinkling of women, respectable white women, among the many men who followed the wagon as Clem guided the eight yoke through the rutted, slimy mud of Main Street. Clem was on the box now, as befitted a captain with his first command, and Bill Fairweather marched beside the swing yoke. A mongrel dog raced alongside and snapped at the nose of the near leader. The popper of Fairweather's whip caught him, and his barks changed in midair to agonized yelps as the red-tipped lash recoiled like a lazy snake. Fairweather bellowed with laughter, echoed by those at the roadside. The wagon's progress was marked by shouted inquiries.

"T-M. What outfit's that, pardner?"

"How're you fixed f'r flour? I'll take a hundred pounds if th' price is even halfway right."

"Any drinkin' likker?"

"How's f'r coffee beans?"

"Any t'baccy, friend?"

Jesse Minor stepped from between two red-shirted prospectors and swung himself to the box beside Talbot. The white hat was no longer spotless, and the mixture of grease and chimney soot on his calfskin boots did not conceal numerous scratches received from the gravel of the creek, but his black broadcloth was unwrinkled, his linen snowy. He gripped Clem's hand.

"No need of asking you if you had a good trip, old-timer. Those bulls look fit to turn around and start back tomorrow."

"They could, too. I ain't tried t' push 'em, an' they've put on beef t' make up f'r what fat they've lost."

"Who's your helper?"

"Feller I picked up in Salt Lake. Name o' Bill Fairweather. He's crazier'n a ruttin' ellick in some ways, but he's a damn good hand with bulls. Where you goin' t' unload this stuff, Jesse? Th' town's sure growin', but I don't see nothin' that looks like a storeshed."

"One's building, along with a corral and stalls, but there won't be much need of a storehouse this trip. I don't know what you've got aboard, Clem, but I'm betting you'll sell it as fast as you can get it out of the wagon. Turn here, Clem, and go up to the house."

"C'rect." The long whip cracked like a rifle a foot above the leaders' ears. "Star! Little Buck! Haw, you, haw!"

Obediently, the leaders pivoted to the left. Trail, swing, and wheel yokes followed in their tracks.

"Which one is Bright?" Jesse asked.

"Nigh wheeler—why?"

"Just wanted to be sure you weren't breaking the rules. I never saw a bull team yet that didn't have a Star and a Bright in it."

"And a Buck," Clem chuckled. "I got two Bucks, but that off leader he knows by now he's Little Buck. Whoa up, you, whoa!" He thrust his foot aagainst the brake lever. "By Gorry-Moses, Jesse, the house sure looks elegant. Hi, Miss Ann, how be ye?"

The three men unloaded those goods destined for the Minors' personal use while Bannack stood at the roadside and gaped. A wooden frame, corded to support the feather mattresses, served as a bedstead in each of the two rooms. Jesse removed the cords and knocked the pegged frames apart—carefully, for few commodities were more expensive than dressed lumber—and made space for the beds which Clem had brought. Head- and foot-boards were of pine, but the low posts were a hard, close-grained wood which Clem could not identify.

"I reckon it's one of them mountain woods," he said, "though

one feller tried t' tell me it was su'thin' they call muskeet from 'way down toward th' Colorady River of th' West. There's a Englishman named Hargreaves, a woodturner by trade, has set up a shop near th' old sugar mill. I brung four—he made me a good price, an' they pack nice an' flat. Two f'r th' cabin here, Miss Ann, an' two f'r sellin'."

Ann passed her hand over the smooth ball-finials.

"They're beautiful, Clem, just beautiful. Some of the women here would be willing to go without flour or coffee, I know, if they could own beds like these."

Clem's gray-green eyes flickered toward her. He said, "Shouldn't wonder," but he said it absently while he watched the girl, now a matron, with whom he had crossed the plains. There seemed no changes in the smooth oval of her face, the gray eyes were unworried, unperplexed. *She seems kinda funny. She's nach'rally quiet—even on th' Platte, 'fore her pa took sick, she wasn't racin' an' tearin' round th' camp like some of them other young fillys an' showin' off in front of anything that wore pants—but now it seems like she's tryin' t' pull a hill with her brake locked. I hope they ain't fightin'. They had it kinda hot an' heavy at Sheep Rock a'ter Jesse give that feller a cleanin', but, shucks, that was nigh two months ago—nobody's goin' t' hold a grudge that long.*

"We'll go right ahead an' set up th' stove now, Miss Ann. There ain't a better stove t' be had in Great Salt Lake City, not even if ye went into th' Lion House an' took old Brigham's. I told ye ye'd have a good one, an' that's what ye got. Y' know, Jesse, I'd as lief pack eggs as stovepipe. Th' stuff takes up more room than it c'd ever be worth, an' it squashes like a stomped-on persimmon if yuh even look at it real hard."

Jesse had allowed space for the stove in his building. A hole for the pipe was let into the chimney, and the plank flooring was broken by a rectangle of flat rocks mortared in a permanent foundation of burned limestone and clay. The stove had been dismounted for packing, but the dealer from whom it had been purchased had supplied the necessary bolts and nuts and a

wrench. Clem and Jesse assembled the stove. Ann watched them, and Bill Fairweather, for once silent, watched Ann.

"You'll eat here tonight, of course," she said. "All of you. We'll raid the wagon for just the best of everything that Clem's brought. And after supper we can go over your lists, Clem, and decide on prices."

It was Bill Fairweather who answered her.

"We'd best not, ma'am. That stove's brand-new, and ye'll sure want t' give it th' house all t' itself f'r half a day when ye lay th' first fire in it. It'll stink like all git out till th' paint's burned an' set."

"There's a good bit of truth in that, my dear," Jesse confirmed.

"But—"

"An' besides, there's th' bulls." Talbot's eyes had met Fairweather's, and he had interpreted his friend's grimaces as meaning that the invitation was to be politely declined. "Time we finish up here it'll be gittin' late, an' there's sixteen bulls t' be fed. You'd best show us how t' git t' th' corral, Jesse. We c'd unload some of th' stuff an' git ready f'r sellin' in th' mornin'."

Later, after they had fed the oxen and cooked their own meal, Clem demanded an explanation.

"Whut's th' matter—'re you skeered of wimmin? Hell, Bill, Miss Ann ain't th' kind t' mind if a feller's boots is muddy or th' backside of his pants is tore—why didn't yuh want t' stick yore big feet under a table while yuh et a woman's cookin'?"

"I'm figgerin'." Fairweather squatted on his heels, his knees in his armpits, his big hands dangling between his ankles.

"Figgerin' whut? Figgerin' I'll buy ye thet drink? I will—t'morrer, after th' sellin'—but it'll be jest plain panther-pis'n. If we'd et with Jess Minor t'night, ye'd likely 've drunk somethin' special. I mind in Great Salt Lake City he bought this here French brandy. I w'dn't say two snorts of it'd make ye fly, but ye c'd ketch things thet had wings."

"I've drunk it. . . . Whut sort of a feller is he, Clem?"

"Jess Minor? He's hell an' repeat, Bill. He's 's quiet-spoken 's

a preacher at a buryin', an' a real theayter-actor ain't crankier about his clothes than what Jesse is, but don't read him wrong 'cause he cleans underneath his fingernails. He c'n be quicker'n a stingin' adder an' twice 's deadly. I'm tellin' yuh."

"I ain't aimin' t' tangle with him. . . . How 'bout her?"

"Her?"

"Yep—Mis' Minor. Which way does her stick float?"

Clem's back stiffened.

"I ain't bandyin' Miss Ann's name with no gangle-legged Canady jaybird in a bull corral," he growled. "If ye don't like it . . ."

Fairweather took no offense. He seemed scarcely to have heard his companion's words.

"A man—'r a woman either—makes a trail plainer'n a hamstrung moose in snow," he said slowly, "an' yet yuh can't read it. Men-critters c'n hide what's goin' on behind their faces, which is more than animals can. I know what them two is doin', but why're they doin' it? It don't make sense."

"Jes' what in hell 're yuh talkin' about, Bill? What don't make sense?"

"Them two. They ain't been married four months yet—y' said so y'rself—so why'd they build that there cabin with two bedrooms, one f'r him an' one f'r her?"

"You ijjit! I'll have y' t' know that there's my room—mine. I'm one of th' fam'ly. I'd be bedded down in that room right now if it wasn't f'r eight yoke of bulls an' a gingy-whiskered Canajian whut—"

"Whut c'n see more in five seconds than you c'd in five days! Yo're thicker in th' head than a mule in the ass, Clem Talbot. Yore room! If it's yore room whut 're his clothes doin' there—an' his razors—an' a pa'r of moccasins under th' bed an' his nightshirt under th' piller. In th' other room there was nothin' but female fixin's. Both them beds had been slept in, both of 'em. Tell me that makes sense!"

"Mebbe—"

"An' mebbe not. I know what y're thinkin', an' it ain't that

mebbe thy're takin' in a roomer. Is a man goin' t' git in bed with his wife an' then walk clear 'cross th' house when time comes f'r sleepin'?"

"I . . ." Clem Talbot hesitated. *Them nights on th' trail all th' way from Sheep Rock, where they'd had that fight, t' th' Beaverhead. "I think I'll turn in. Good night, Jesse." "Good night, Ann." An' Jesse settin' up smokin' an' talkin' an' then takin' off his boots so he wouldn't wake her when he climbed into th' wagon. I never heard 'em talkin' there, 'r laughin'—'r anything. A bed on each side an' a curtain 'tween 'em, jest like when Ann an' her father slept there. . . . Whut right had this goddam Fairweather got t' stick his long nose into things like that? No right at all, but jest th' same it didn't make sense. It didn't make sense.*

"I ain't sayin' yo're right, an' I ain't sayin' yo're wrong," he observed at last. "Whut I am sayin' is that it ain't none of yore business—n'r mine either. Git up off yore hunkers now, Bill. Nobody'll bother this stuff f'r ten minutes, an' I'll buy y' that drink I promised."

"I don't want it, not now," said Bill Fairweather. "D'yuh know, Clem, whut I can't figger out is which one of them two I'm sorriest for."

6

The contents of the wagon and trailer were sold as swiftly as they could be unloaded and the eager miners informed of their nature. The prices obtained surprised even Jesse Minor. He had aided Ann and Clem in figuring the cost of transportation and had recommended a markup of one hundred per cent over the cost in Great Salt Lake City. Few of those prices were quoted to the eager purchasers. The sale became to all intents an auction with the buyers themselves fixing the prices. Nails which had cost Clem ten dollars a keg in Utah sold for thirty-five dollars, gold; sugar was snapped up at sixty cents a pound; apples—Clem had bought two barrels from a rancher on Bear River—fifty cents a pound; sardines for which he had paid twenty-five cents a box were fought for at one dollar, gold; and he could

have sold a hundred pairs of rubber boots instead of the dozen, all size ten, which he had found on the shelves of a supply store on Main Street. He had obtained the lot for fifty dollars; men bought them for fifteen in greenbacks, thirteen in gold, and were offered twenty as soon as it was learned how few were available.

Five hundred pounds of flour and half as much sugar and coffee were locked in the warehouse. Ann shook her head when Clem asked if she planned to hold the food for still-higher prices.

"No. There will be people in Bannack who will be hungry this winter. Hungry and without money to pay for what they need. We'll save that for them—the T-M Company can afford to be that generous."

Recapitulation showed that Ann had been returned more than forty percent on her investment after deducting all of Talbot's expenses, the cost of the trailer and the additional oxen, and the two dollars a day—teamster's wages—which she said Bill Fairweather should be paid. Clem had not spent all of the money advanced him; more than a thousand dollars remained on deposit with Wells-Fargo in Great Salt Lake City. Jesse Minor was enthusiastic.

"You've struck a winning game," he declared, "and now's the time to play it for all it's worth. Give your cattle a few days' rest and then start south again. Don't come back with just the one team, either. Make it as many as you can buy or hire or steal. This camp can't blow up before spring now, and there's money enough to pay for all you can pack in."

They were seated in the cabin, Ann and Clem Talbot at the table, Bill Fairweather—silent and uncomfortable—on a chair against the wall, and Jesse standing. The two partners had counted the receipts from the sale, and the money was on the table between them. There were gleaming little columns of gold holding in place soiled and wrinkled greenbacks sorted by denominations. There was little silver.

"What do you think, Clem?" Ann asked. It was as though she deferred to one of wider experience than her husband.

"I dunno, right off. We made a nice turnover, but th' idee of runnin' a train of mebbe a dozen wagons—like Jesse says—kinda skeers me. It'll take money. It'll take all we made an' all you got, Miss Ann, an' mebbe more yet t' load a train like that. Where's it comin' from—less'n you want t' buy in, Jesse."

"No. You two started it, so finish it." Torture could not have compelled Jesse Minor to admit that at that moment he possessed less than two thousand dollars. He had built the cabin, he had bought small interests in a number of claims on Grasshopper Creek and Jeff Davis Gulch and French Gulch, and his gambling profits had been negligible. He who had been accustomed to play for hundreds and thousands now sat in mild games of Old Sledge in Peabody's combination saloon and barber shop or played poker with a fifty-cent limit and a ten-dollar change-in.

Jesse played such games as carelessly as though he had been skipping flat stones across the surface of a pond. He had no desire to win ten or fifteen dollars in the course of an evening's play with the men who dug in the gravel of Grasshopper Creek. He wanted to find adversaries from among men of his own class, professionals, and the professional gamblers had not yet been drawn to the Beaverhead. Bannack was booming; but it was not yet a boom town, and the professionals who banked their own games remained in San Francisco and Sacramento and in the towns of the Comstock Lode. It was a day when gambling was as much a profession as law or medicine and was equally respected. More respected, at times. More than a generation would pass before the professional gambler would begin to find his activities restricted, but the miners of Jimmy's Bar, in the Independent District of the Beaverhead, passed with their first organization a resolution declaring that "no lawyer, counsellor, or attorney shall be allowed to practise, plead, or act in the capacity of an attorney before the court in investigating a dispute in this district." Jesse Minor was not broke in the late fall of 1862, but he deftly avoided any commitments which might compel him to reveal the low state of his assets.

"Why come after me for money?" he asked. "Go to Wells-

Fargo in Great Salt Lake. Go talk to those three Englishmen, the Walker brothers, that made the big clean-up while Johnston's Army was at Camp Floyd. You'll be spending the money in Great Salt Lake City, so that's the place to borrow it—not here in Bannack."

"Gawd!" Clem interrupted. "What're ye wishin' on me, Jesse? I'd as lief walk in on a she-bear with cubs as I would on a bankin' man t' ask him f'r money."

Jesse laughed. Bill Fairweather crossed the room, opened the door, and spat into the slushy snow. He returned to his chair, wiping his long mustaches.

"Did y' ever tie into a she-bear, Clem?" he asked. "If y' had y'd be showin' a heap more sense right now. All a banker c'n do is say no. He can't take a swipe at ye with a pawful of six-inch claws. All y' got t' do is show 'em what y' got an' ask 'em straight out if they choose t' buy any chips—that's all. Old Bill Fairweather ain't skeered of no bankers—but he sure respects a she-bear."

"Mebbe ye'll go in an' talk t' th' Wells-Fargo boss or these here Walkers when we git t' Great Salt Lake City?" Talbot growled.

"Shore I will!" The legs of Fairweather's tilted chair crashed suddenly to the floor. "Oh, my God! What've I let myself in for now? I come up here t' hunt gold, not t' talk t' bankers, 'r punch bulls f'r a jimber-jawed Missouri puke. Y' got t' let me off, Bill!"

"No!" snapped Talbot. Jesse laughed again.

"It's November now, Bill," he said, "and they tell me real winter ought to have been here long ago. It's freezing every night, though, and there's snow on the mountains. The cold will shut down on us any time now, and there'll be an end to prospecting or digging."

"Not f'r me," grumbled Fairweather. "Cold don't skeer me. I c'n curl up outa th' wind an' let th' snow kivver me an' sleep like a grizzly b'ar. I c'n sleep a week if'n I have to."

"If you're caught out in the mountains in winter you'll sleep longer than that," said Jesse quietly. "How are you going to prospect, Bill, with ten or twenty feet of snow covering every-

thing in sight? How are you going to dig in gravel that's frozen hard enough to turn the point of a pick? Where'll you find water to wash your pay dirt?"

"Oh, shut up. I told Clem I'd do th' argufying with them bankers if he was scared to, didn't I? This freightin' is his business, his an' hers, not yours." He glared through his whiskers at the grinning Jesse. "It's her I'm a-talkin' to now. Mis' Minor, you said you'd pay me two dollars a day f'r th' time I put in punchin' bulls an' listenin' t' Clem Talbot grunt an' cuss an' carry on. Countin' yestiddy an' t'day that makes thirty-six dollars. I want t' draw it, right now. I want t' buy me a thirty-six dollar drunk, an' then I'll go 'long with Clem."

7

The date of the pair's departure from Bannack is uncertain, nor can one state positively that Bill Fairweather bought the drunk with his first wages from the T-M partnership. Bill's drunks were to become epochal in the Beaverhead district and in towns which were unborn and undreamed-of as the year 1862 drew to a close, but of his earlier alcoholic excesses no record survives.

Nor is there record of who furnished the funds which enabled Clem Talbot and Ann Minor to embark more pretentiously in the freighting business and thus prepare themselves for the vastly increased demands which were to come. The money was borrowed, that is certain: borrowed, repaid, and very possibly borrowed again. No one ever held any share in the company, which was a limited partnership throughout its existence. Ann Minor was responsible for that.

"You'll have to borrow money, Clem," she said, "but don't let the Walker brothers or anyone else talk you into giving them a share in the business. I remember papa telling me something that his father had said. Grandfather Carmeny was a Massachusetts Yankee, and he made and lost and made again a great deal of money. 'You can always get rid of a note-holder,' he said, 'even if you have to go through bankruptcy to do it; but when you sell stock you're selling your own brains and ability and

your chance to make anything out of them, and you've got the stockholders around your neck like a collar for the rest of your life.'"

No stock was sold, but from someone in Great Salt Lake City—possibly the canny Walkers—Clem obtained backing which enabled him to buy three more freighting wagons and teams and to hire four others, with oxen and drivers. The trip to the Beaverhead and return could be made in five weeks—less than half the time required for freighters to journey from the Mormon capital to the distant railheads at St. Joseph and Iowa City. The passage of the southern Bitterroots was far less arduous than the long drag from South Pass to Fort Laramie, and Clem had little difficulty in obtaining men and wagons. The *Deseret News* for this period contains an item to the effect that "a man giving his name as Fairweather was fined ten dollars and costs in police court for creating a disturbance while drunk and for using offensive language toward the arresting officer. The fine was paid by his employer."

There survives, too, a page torn from a ledger-ruled account book. On it Clem Talbot recorded in large, unformed letters that he had:

BO'T:

1,000 lbs wheat flour, coars ground	\$200.00
10 pr gold scales for Jessy	75.00
4 Colt's revolvers, not new, cal. .44	40.00
4 bots. French brandy	24.00

The reverse side of the page bears the notation: "Snake River Ferry now Meeks'. Price up to \$10 a waggon which not many can pay."

It is to be inferred that Clem paid the increased rate. He had too much at stake to risk swimming his stock across the swift and treacherous stream. Clem never hesitated when risks were necessary, but he took risks only when no safer and surer course presented itself. He was superlatively careful rather than timid, and it was merely an exemplification of that attention to detail which prompted him to leave the train two days' drive south of

Horse Prairie and ride to Bannack. Feed and some sort of shelter had to be arranged for more than one hundred and fifty head of stock—oxen, horses, and mules—and merchants in the town would benefit by advance information that goods ordered would reach them shortly. Clem took Bill Fairweather with him, and each of them led a spare horse to which they changed when their mounts began to tire. It was nearly midnight of January 20 when they reached Bannack.

The town was wide awake. From the top of the hill to the west, where the road pitched steeply down to the valley of Grasshopper Creek, they could see the flames of a large fire which had been kindled in the middle of Main Street. Buildings were lighted, too, and as the horses reached level ground and trotted over the hard-packed snow the riders saw that many of those buildings were new since they had left the town. Percy & Hacker, Saloon . . . Goodrich's Hotel & Bar . . . Peabody's Saloon. Barber Shop in Connection . . . Henry Crawford, Meat Market . . . George Crisman, General Store and Miners' Supplies.

Men surged restlessly out of the saloons, stood for a brief space about the fire, which painted the buildings luridly, and then hurried away. They moved in groups, restlessly, and a shouted word seemed sufficient to send half the population in some new direction. Clem saw only four men who appeared to be static. They stood on the board sidewalk outside the new butcher shop, and all were armed. Occasionally one stooped to warm his hands over a bucket of hot embers which had been brought from the larger fire in the street. Clem recognized one and shouted to him.

"Hey, Phil Royle! What's all th' excitement about?"

The man looked up quickly.

"Hi, Clem. Better get those hosses out of here 'fore somebody misunderstands what they're for. We're figuring on whether or not to hang some no-'count sons of bitches, that's what."

A man in the crowd replied.

"Try it!" he shouted defiantly. "This ain't California, and that vigilanter stuff doesn't go here!"

"No stranglers"—this was another voice, equally hostile—"are goin' t' hang any friends of ours!"

Clem touched his weary mount with the spur.

"We'll get outa here, Bill. Let's put th' hosses up an' find Jesse. He'll know what it's all about."

They found Jesse Minor in the first saloon they entered—Percy & Hacker's. He was standing at the end of the bar, alone, with an untouched glass of whisky before him. He seemed quite oblivious to the miners who stamped and shouted about the room, but his eyes twinkled as he saw the two men pushing toward him through the crowd.

"Hello, Clem. Hello, Bill. Don't tell me you brought your loads in tonight just to add to the excitement."

"We came ahead—th' wagons won't be in 'fore day after t'morrer. God A'mighty, Jesse, what's up round here!"

A man thrust his head through the doorway and shouted above the tumult of many voices.

"They've turned Henry Plummer loose!" he bellowed.

More than half of the men in the place stampeded toward the door. They shouted, but their shouts expressed neither approval nor disapproval of the news. Half drunk, they were ready to shout at any news or at no news. Jesse signaled the bartender.

"Two glasses, Ed. Bannack," he continued, "is growing up."

Clem and Fairweather filled their glasses. Bill growled, "Regards, Jess," drank, and quickly refilled his glass. Talbot repeated his earlier question.

"What's it all about, Jesse?"

"The town's growing up, I told you. There are some signs that it might be ready to put on long pants within a day or two. This business started with a shooting—"

"Plenty good beginnin' f'r trouble. Who shot who, Jesse? Anybody I know?"

"No. Two fellows that hit town after you left. A man named Plummer, Henry Plummer, and another that called himself Jack Cleveland. They came in from the north, from up Sun River way. Seems like they missed the last steamer down the Missouri

from Fort Benton and decided to winter on Sun River and then came down here."

"Long ways t' come jest t' shoot each other," Fairweather commented.

"They'd been partners, Plummer says. An odd pair ever to team up together. Plummer's a quiet sort of fellow—drinks a little but never too much—while Cleveland was a rantin', stampin', loud-mouthed drunk who seemed to start looking for a fight as soon as he got out of bed in the morning. He found one. Plummer shot him full of holes over in Peabody's place last Wednesday. Cleveland had made a couple of plays at flashing a gun, and I guess Plummer got tired of it. That's what he said, anyhow. He was sitting on a bench by the stove, and he jumped up and yelled, 'I'm getting tired of this!' and let Cleveland have it."

"Killed him right off, eh?"

"No, but he softened him plenty. Knocked him down and then waited, cool as ice, for him to get up. Just as soon as Cleveland was on his feet Plummer let him have another. Some of the boys picked Cleveland up and carried him to Hank Crawford's cabin in back of the butcher shop. He died later in the day.

"That gave us something to talk about, but nobody thought it called for any action being taken. It was a private argument that got settled, that was all. Then yesterday—Monday—we had some new excitement. Three fellows shot up the Indian camp over on the edge of Yankee Flat. Killed three bucks and a papoose and wounded a couple of white men who happened to be in the camp."

"What for?"

"Woman trouble. One of the fellows—Charley Reeves—had a squaw, and she left him and went back to her people with a story of how he used to get drunk and beat her. Reeves went to get her back, and he took two of his pals with him, Bill Moore and Bill Mitchell. All three were pretty tough agates—like a lot of others who have holed up here for the winter—and when the head man of the Indians wouldn't turn the woman over to them they pulled guns and cut loose on the place. They left town on

the high lope, but some of the boys took out after them and caught up with them on Rattlesnake Creek. Henry Plummer was with them—God only knows why—so they fetched him along with the others. You heard that fellow say a few minutes ago that Plummer had been turned loose."

"Who d'you mean by 'they'?" Fairweather asked. "You got Vigilanters in this gulch a'ready?"

"No—not yet. What happened was that they organized the Bannack District, that's all. The posse that brought those fellows in is listening to what each one has to say and trying to make up its mind what ought to be done with them. Here comes Plummer now."

The man who stood in the doorway was thirty-four years old but was generally assumed to be younger. His rather full face was unlined, and his brown hair might be described as sandy at first glance. It was brown, however, and quite lacking in any reddish shades although his mustache, close-cropped above straight, cruel lips, had a distinctly reddish hue. Except for the mustache he was clean-shaven. He and Jesse Minor were probably the only men in Bannack who shaved daily. Plummer was slightly above average height, weighed about one hundred and sixty pounds, and was neatly dressed in a well-fitting blue suit that as yet had required no reinforcing with buckskin at cuffs and pockets. His hands were almost femininely small. Only in his eyes was there any measure of an otherwise rather inconspicuous man. They were wide-spaced eyes, sapphire blue, and as cold as Henry Plummer's heart. Women found them—and Plummer!—fascinating.

He dropped a military greatcoat, lined with red baize, over a chair and poured himself a modest drink from the bottle which the bartender set in front of him. He caught Minor's eye in the mirror behind the bar and smiled broadly.

"Alone, Plummer?" Jesse called. "Bring your drink over and sit down."

"Thanks, I will." He nodded and said, "Howdy," when Jesse introduced Talbot and Fairweather. His voice was low and modulated.

"I guess I was something of a damn fool, Jesse," he said quietly. "Luckily for me that self-appointed jury took my word as to what happened."

"I haven't tried to keep up with things, Henry, but I'll admit I was surprised to hear you'd thrown in with those Indian-killers."

"That's where the damn foolishness came in." Plummer ignored Talbot and Fairweather. "There was so much loose talk after Reeves and his pals shot up the camp that I was afraid some bunch of hotheads with a rope would take after me for the Cleveland business. If I didn't want to hang I might have to kill somebody, and if I killed somebody I'd undoubtedly be hanged—so I thought I'd get out of town until the excitement died down. I lit out, and when I saw smoke in a little patch of timber on Rattlesnake Creek I headed for it to get warm—it was no day to be riding for pleasure. Mitchell and Reeves and Moore were around the fire—three fellows that I wasn't particularly anxious to meet, but I'd have been friendly with the Old Boy himself if he'd let me get warm. That's where I was when the posse rode up. Reeves and his friends didn't think they'd be followed. They argued that nobody would take the trail in weather like this over a couple of Indians."

"What's going to happen to them now?" Jesse inquired. He could ask any question and at the same time appear quite in-curious.

"They're locked up till tomorrow, and the self-appointed committee has gone home to bed. Some on the street are hollering for a Miner's Court, others for a jury."

Jesse said mildly, "I heard some of the talk," and crooked his finger to the bartender.

"None for me," Plummer said, then amended the decision. "Well, just a small one. A fellow doesn't get his neck out of a noose every day."

Bill Fairweather snorted, then laughed and reached for the bottle.

"You kin have jest one more, Bill," said Clem Talbot severely.

"Mebbe yuh don't know it, but yuh got work t' do t'morrer—you an' me both."

"Better make it a cab driver's drink, my friend," Plummer interjected. Fairweather stared at him.

"I hate t' admit I got anything t' learn 'bout drinkin'," he said, "but that's shore a new one on me."

Plummer picked up his glass.

"Saw a fellow do it in—in California," he remarked. "He said it was the way a New York hack-driver took a drink when his fare offered to buy him one—just one."

He circled the glass with thumb and forefinger, lapping them until the flesh stood a full half inch above the rim, then put his lips against his thumb and drank.

"A fellow that's careful can build up a pretty good drink that way without spilling a drop."

Fairweather roared with laughter as he practiced for a moment before tilting the bottle.

"Friend," he declared, "when this here Missouri slavedriver pays me off I'm shore gonna buy you one t' pay f'r learnin' me that. One drink, eh? Watch me, Clem!"

He poured until the liquor slopped over his knuckles, then drank noisily. Clem, as angry as he was amused, waited until the glass was empty and then herded Fairweather out of the saloon. The place was empty now except for a few men who stood at the bar, obstinately determined that the good start obtained earlier in the evening should not be wasted. Jesse Minor lifted his glass.

"Well, here's to your neck and your saving it, Henry," he said lightly.

"Thanks." Plummer was silent for a moment, then lifted his slim hand and passed it over his throat. "I've seen men hanged," he said, "and all of them deserved what they got. I'd sure hate to hang unless I did deserve it, though. That Jack Cleveland needed killing if ever a man did."

"I don't think there'd be many around here to argue with you about that, Henry. From what we saw of him he sure spent most of his time hunting trouble."

"He found it!" said Plummer savagely. His blue eyes caught and reflected an orange-yellow glow from the lamp overhead. "Only mistake I made was in not finishing the job right. He was three hours dying—three hours to shoot off his big mouth and—and—and talk too much!"

He stammered momentarily, then blurted the final words. There was no change in Jesse's expression. *You're scared, Plummer, scared bad. First time I've ever seen you lose your grip. Maybe those fellows put the fear of God in you tonight.* Aloud he said mildly: "All I know is what Harry Phleger told me. He said Cleveland not only didn't talk but wouldn't talk after they carried him to Crawford's. All he'd say was that it didn't make any difference what the fight was about; he'd lost, and he guessed he could stand it. When Hank Crawford—"

"Crawford!" The pulse was throbbing visibly in the angle of the other man's jaw.

"When Crawford told him they were friends of his he said he didn't have any friends. That was just before he cashed in."

If Plummer heard, he gave no sign. He built the three empty glasses into a pyramid, then balanced two of them rim to rim and placed the third atop.

"I got in with a tough bunch on the other side of the mountains," he said slowly. "Gambling did it, maybe. You know the kind you meet when you gamble for a living. I've had my winnings, and I've had some big losings too. . . ." *You would, Plummer. It takes nerve to gamble professionally. You're as cold-blooded as a snake, but a snake is always looking for a place to hide. When the big chance came—the chance that you've played all night waiting for—your nerve wouldn't stand up in the pinch.*

"I wanted to leave all that behind me when I came here. I told myself that these were brand-new diggings in a new country and I'd drop all that old crowd and get off to a fresh start. I'm going to get a stake. Maybe buy a little land or a few feet in some promising claims. I'll watch for silver—"

"Silver?" Jesse interrupted sharply.

"Why not? It ran with the gold in the Comstock, didn't it?"

Only trouble was that the boys there didn't know it when they saw it."

Jesse said, "Yes." It was history that untold millions in sulphuretted silver had been washed away in the tailings from the Comstock gold workings.

"I know silver," Plummer continued. "For a fee I'll go over anybody's claim, and if it's good I can get a piece of it while it's cheap. It won't take me long to build up the stake I need to get married."

He paused expectantly, but Jesse said nothing. Many men before Henry Plummer had tried to read Jesse Minor's face.

"Cleveland wanted her," Plummer went on, "but he never stood a chance. He knew I'd got her, and all his big talk down here was aimed at me. He wanted a fight so he could ride back to Sun River alone. I gave him his fight, and I'll be the one to ride to Sun River. None of the Oro Fino roughs that have moved over here will stop me, either."

He rose so suddenly that his chair toppled backward. He picked up the overcoat he had tossed to another chair and thrust his arms into the sleeves.

"We're putting the town to bed, Jesse," he exclaimed. "Let's have one drink to celebrate it, and then I'm heading for my room at Goodrich's. I think I'll stay there through the excitement tomorrow, too."

"You're counting on there being some excitement?"

"Plenty, Jesse. You haven't seen many of the Yankee Flat gang around tonight, have you? They'll come out of their holes tomorrow, and they won't be dodging trouble if there's any around. My regards, Jesse."

They drank with simple but punctilious ceremony and walked together as far as Goodrich's new hotel.

"Good night, Henry."

"Good night, Jesse—say, how well do you know Henry Crawford?"

"About well enough to pass the time of day with him. My wife buys her meat at his store."

"It was in his cabin that Jack Cleveland died—and now

they've elected him sheriff of the Bannack District. Hank Crawford—I don't like it a damn bit."

He turned on his heel and swung into the darkened hotel. Jesse Minor walked through the snow to the cabin on the rutted lane which was called Third Cross Street. Ann's bedroom door was open, as always, and she spoke from the darkness.

"Jesse?"

"Yes. Go on back to sleep. It's almost three o'clock."

"Jesse—did they hang those men? Mrs. Bottom said they were going to."

"They did not." He lit a candle and hung his overcoat on one of the pegs driven into the log walls. "Mrs. Bottom and her husband have been here less than two weeks, and they impress me as an ideally mated couple—both of them being complete fools. Don't listen to women's gossip. By the way, Clem got in tonight."

"With the teams? How many, Jesse?"

"Eight, I think he said." Jesse sat on the arm of a chair and removed his felt boots. In comparison with the bitter cold outside, the room was warm. Ann always banked the fire very carefully, and the hot coals lasted until morning. "He and Bill came on ahead. The wagons won't get in until Wednesday."

"Did Clem have anything special to say?"

"Nothing that I can remember, so I imagine everything is in good shape. He and Bill turned in down at the warehouse, and I got to talking with Henry Plummer—"

"Why, I thought . . ." He could hear the tight cords creak as she sat suddenly upright. He could see her. He could see the wide gray eyes and the full lips and the strong, clean line of white throat and shoulder above the warm flannel nightgown. She would be sitting with her slender hands clasped about her knees, and the bed would be warm from her body.

"Plummer wasn't mixed up in the Indian shooting. As soon as he explained things he was given a clear bill. The others are going to get some sort of a trial in the morning. I'd keep away from Main Street if I were you—it'll be no place for a woman."

"Are you going to the trial?"

"I doubt it. I think I'll follow Henry Plummer's example and let others worry about hanging parties. By the way, Mr. Plummer expects to be married—"

"Married!"

"Nothing less—or more. He aspires to respectability, my dear, and a place in our little community."

"Don't twist everything I say, Jesse. I was surprised—and did he tell you who he was going to marry?"

"He didn't say—except that she is now living at Sun River, and he gave the impression that she was a white girl and not a Blackfoot squaw."

"Of course not. Anyone can tell from looking at Mr. Plummer that he's a gentleman."

"Undoubtedly." There was no retort, and he moved soundlessly across the room in his stocking feet. The latch clicked as he opened the door of the other bedroom.

"Good night, Ann."

"Good night, Jesse."

The nightly ritual was ended. He closed the door and undressed swiftly, tossing his clothes at the chair and diving into the flannel nightgown which was folded beneath the pillow. It was colder than a hurdy-girl's heart in here—Ann might have opened the door after she had banked the fire.

8

Jesse learned only by hearsay of the events of the following day. He adhered to the decision he had made after talking with Henry Plummer and approached no nearer to Main Street than the T-M corral where he sat and smoked and chatted with Bill Fairweather while Clem Talbot and Ann went over the manifests of the eight wagons which were climbing the Horse Prairie Divide.

Bill Mitchell was sentenced, without formal trial, to be banished. The action was taken by the committee made up of all those who had aided in the capture of the three roughs. Mitchell had gone to the Indian village with Reeves and Moore but had not participated in the actual firing on the lodges. The

committee declared him not guilty, with full acquittal depending on the speed with which he got out of town. He thanked his jurors politely and journeyed all of half a mile from Main Street, finding a secure haven in one of the hovels on Yankee Flat.

After three hours of arguing, Charley Reeves and Bill Moore were granted a jury trial. Such a trial had been promised them, Nathaniel Langford argued, instead of the customary Miners' Court, hastily organized and equally hasty in action. J. F. Hoyt had been elected judge of the district the day before as had Henry Crawford, the sheriff. Before the trial William Rheem was chosen prosecutor, and George Copley appointed defense attorney. Twelve men assumed to be good and true, were found to serve on the jury of which Nathaniel Langford was foreman. None of those officers had the slightest knowledge of legal procedure, but they tried solemnly to conceal that ignorance. The trial was held in one of the many unfinished buildings along Main Street. The structure was roofed, and the floor had been laid; but neither doors nor windows were yet in place, and the barnlike interior was colder than the high hills which flanked Grasshopper Creek. Planks laid across trestles supplied seats for the jurors; the judge and the attorneys had chairs brought from Peabody's Saloon. Hank Crawford, armed and uncomfortable, stood behind the two prisoners and tried only half-heartedly to restrain them when they laughed at the testimony offered or shouted profane greetings to their friends from Yankee Flat. There were many of those: Cyrus Skinner, proprietor of a nondescript shack which was called the Oro Fino Bar; two brothers named Bunton, Bill and Sam, the younger offensively drunk; a handsome young man named Ned Ray whose chief claim to fame at this date was that he had been accepted as her paramour by Madam Hall, proprietress of one of the first bagnios established in the camp; Jack Gallagher, Buck Stinson, an older man called Tex Crowell, and a score of others. The roughs were outnumbered ten to one by the hard-working miners, the tradesmen, and the respectable element of the townspeople, but they had the rudiments of organization in their defiance of respecta-

bility. They swaggered truculently while the men from Grasshopper and Jeff Davis stood around and watched the proceedings silently and rather aimlessly.

"It was Charley Reeves that started the shootin'," a prospector named Gillian declared from the stand, "but Bill Moore was so close behind him that there weren't no choosin'. I seen 'em."

"Ask him what he was doin' there!" a voice shouted. Gillian replied without giving the prosecutor an opportunity to ignore the suggestion.

"That ain't nobody's business. I'm here to tell what I seen, not what I was doin'."

"Everybody knows what you were doin'," another tormentor called. "Where'd you get the dollar, Ed?"

The room rocked with laughter, and Hoyt pounded on the floor with a billet of stovewood in an attempt to restore order. Jack Gallagher and Tex Crowell swaggered to within a few feet of the improvised jury box.

"Now, Mr. Gillian," Rheem said, "tell the jury if you actually saw anyone hit by the bullets which Reeves and Moore fired."

"'Course I did. I seen Charley Reeves throw down on a Injun that ran out of a wickiup and kill him deader'n George Washington."

A low-pitched inarticulate murmur acknowledged that convincing evidence.

"I'd like"—Jack Gallagher spoke clearly—"I'd sure like to see any goddam jury hang Bill Moore and Charley Reeves. I'd like to see 'em try it."

Cyrus Skinner shouted from across the room: "They know better than t' try it!" and from near the doorway a voice cried sharply: "Put that gun away!"

The day was well advanced before the case was given to the jury. Only one man, the fearless Langford, voted for conviction on the charge of first degree murder. All his eleven timid companions declared for the complete acquittal of Reeves and Moore. They returned finally with the only unanimous verdict which Langford would accept. The two men were found guilty of manslaughter, and Hoyt sentenced them to banishment—

three hours to get out of town and the gallows if they were ever found within six hundred miles of Bannack. Charley Lear, who had been on the jury, told Jesse Minor of the trial. The two men, he said, had left town immediately.

"Didn't take time to pack much grub, did they?" Jesse inquired.

"Not much, I reckon. They were in too much of a hurry to git away. They knew they were lucky."

Jesse's "yes" was only a word, quite expressionless. He busied himself with a cigarette, and Lear—uncomfortable but not knowing why—departed. Some hours later, at their cabin, Ann Minor mentioned the incident to her husband.

"Why didn't you ask Mr. Lear about everything that happened? I wanted to hear all about it; but you just sat there and looked at him as if you didn't see him, and he shut up like a clam."

"Maybe I was disappointed," Jesse said slowly. "I was fool enough to think that Bannack was growing up and that there were enough men in the gulch to hang those two no-'counts. They'll be back here in a couple of weeks."

"Jesse! They wouldn't dare!"

"I'll bet they will, and without much daring. From now on the Yankee Flat gang will be strutting around here like the bull ellicks Clem is always talking about. It's too bad that Langford was the only man with any leather in him."

She placed the coffeepot over the flame.

"You sound as though you were sorry you stayed at the corral, Jesse. I'm glad, though, that you didn't talk yourself into a place on that jury."

"No." He rolled another cigarette and dropped the match into the ashpit of the stove. "Not for me, Ann. I'm not the kind to leap out, waving my bright sword and shouting, 'Follow me, men, to glorious victory or glorious death.' Bannack isn't ready for leaders yet. Langford found that out when he had to compromise—and I'm not the compromising kind."

No, you're not. You wouldn't compromise on anything. You wait for people to come to you, and you're so proud that you

think all you have to do is wait long enough and they're bound to come. Can't you even put your hand out a little way to anyone, Jesse?

Aloud she said: "Supper's ready."

9

Ann was one of the few eyewitnesses when Hank Crawford, sheriff of Bannack, shot and severely wounded Henry Plummer. Not until months had passed and brought other convictions was she able to regard the affair as other than a wanton attempt to murder a man by shooting him in the back. The women of Bannack had their own rather inadequate subjects for talk and gossip; the men—in the best tradition of the period—shielded them from all reports of the feuds of Yankee Flat and of Saloon Row, as the block of buildings on the south side of Main Street had come to be called. Ann had heard nothing of the hate and fear which Plummer held for Crawford. It had never occurred to Jesse to tell her of the encounters on the street and in the saloons when Plummer had repeatedly challenged Crawford to fight and the sheriff had as often refused. She knew both men. Crawford ran the town's only butcher shop, and she bought from him all the meat for her table, nodding gravely when he apologized for having no fresh meat other than venison—deer, elk, and more rarely bear—and again when he told her that he had been promised a beef and that a prime roast would be reserved for her. The beef never materialized, but none of the women of Bannack had expected that it would.

With Plummer she had a speaking acquaintance almost as formal. Jesse had introduced him when she had met the two men on Main Street. She had liked Plummer's quiet voice and his deferent manner and had suggested several times to Jesse that the man be invited to share their Sunday dinner. Jesse had never delivered the invitation, but she bowed to Plummer when she saw him or exchanged words when they met face to face. The men of Bannack raised their hats to ladies, but Henry Plummer was one of the very few who stood bareheaded when talking to any woman. "You might think," said Mrs. Bottom, "that I

was Queen Victoria on her throne and that he was the Duke of—the Duke—you know, the Duke."

The Plummer-Crawford feud reached its climax on the fifth day of March. The snow was still deep on the hills, the creeks were frozen, but the people of Bannack were saying encouragingly that spring could not be far away now. Ann, walking from her cabin to Main Street, sniffed the air in a vain effort to smell the Chinook wind which she had been told would bring warm rains and sweep away the ice and snow almost overnight. She turned into Main Street, lifted her skirts carefully as she stepped to the level of the narrow board sidewalk, and turned the knob on the door of the butcher shop. The door was locked, and the windows too heavily frosted to permit any view of the interior. She turned away and then saw Henry Plummer standing in the doorway of one of the buildings across the street. He was bundled in his military greatcoat and wore two revolvers belted outside the coat. She was about to speak to him, to call across the street and ask if he had seen Crawford, when she heard the powdery snow on the walk behind her creak under someone's foot. She turned again, just as Crawford stepped to the walk from the narrow alley between his shop and the building of the Bannack Restaurant next door. He had a rifle in his hand, and within the instant of her recognizing him he raised the weapon to his shoulder, aimed, and fired. The bitter smoke puffed into her face but was swiftly borne away by the wind. She saw Plummer lying on the sidewalk across the street, and she leaped into the roadway and ran to his side. She knelt beside him and pillowed his head on her knee. His startingly blue eyes opened.

"Some son of a bitch shot me!" he gasped, then blinked and peered into the face so close to his own. "Mrs. Minor! I beg your pardon. I never dreamed—"

"No matter. Are you hurt, Mr. Plummer?"

"My arm . . ." He moved his right arm slightly, and she saw that the sleeve of the greatcoat was soaked with blood. "It hurts like the devil," he added.

Men had hurried from the saloons at the sound of the shot and now stood around the wounded man.

"You!" Ann ordered one of them. "Get a knife somewhere and split that coatsleeve. We've got to stop that bleeding. And you"—to another—"run and get Dr. Glick. Don't stand there gawping. Hurry!"

Several of the men laughed, and she heard one say, chuckling, "It's Jesse Minor's wife." The laughter died away when the blade of Tex Crowell's long knife cut through the shirt and coat and overcoat and laid bare Plummer's arm. The bullet had struck him in the elbow and traveled the length of the forearm. Its course was a deep and ragged furrow, bleeding profusely. Ann whipped the scarf from around Plummer's throat and knotted it about the upper arm. Someone thrust a short stick through the looped scarf and began twisting without waiting instructions from her. She raised her eyes and saw her husband.

"We'll take care of him, Ann," he said quietly. "You go on home. We'll take him to his cabin and get him in bed."

"Don't let him walk, Jesse. Carry him. He's lost—"

"I know. Dr. Glick will be along in a minute."

She rose. One of the men picked up and handed to her the pocketbook which she had dropped. She stepped down into the trodden snow of the street and saw a red stain from her crimsoned boots. Frank Wray, a miner whom she knew, was standing in the doorway of Crawford's butcher shop. He raised his head as she approached.

"I saw you over there, Mis' Minor—I take it Plummer wasn't killed."

"No. He was struck in the arm. It looks like a very—"

Wray had turned away and opened the shop door for a few inches. Over his shoulder she saw Hank Crawford, white-faced, standing by the block on which he cut his meats. He had laid down the rifle and was wearing a belt with a Navy revolver in an open holster.

"You winged him, Hank," Wray said, "and it's his gun hand. He's not dead, though, and probably won't be."

Crawford did not reply, and Wray closed the door.

"Didn't mean to interrupt you like that, Mis' Minor," he said politely, "but I figured they'd want to know what had happened."

"I saw everything," said Ann. "I was standing right where I am now when Mr. Crawford came out of the alley there with a rifle in his hand. He shot Mr. Plummer without any warning. If he'd killed him it would have been cold-blooded murder."

Wray merely looked at her. His eyes were bleak, expressionless.

"I was the one that gave Hank Crawford the gun," he said. "Plummer was laying for him—had threatened to kill him on sight. It's too bad Hank didn't kill him."

She stared at him coldly and turned away. Jesse, when he came to the house several hours later, was casually uninformative. No one had been killed. Plummer, who had attempted on several occasions to provoke a fight with Crawford, was effectively out of action with a right arm so crippled that it was a question if he would ever use it again. The entire matter would probably be allowed to rest there.

"But, Jesse," Ann protested. "I saw it all. Mr. Crawford just came around the corner of the restaurant building, lifted his gun, and shot. He didn't give Mr. Plummer any warning at all."

"Which was where he showed good sense," Jesse remarked. "Plummer was out to kill him—why, only Plummer knows. Crawford's no hand with a gun, and Plummer is. There are only two men in Bannack, my dear, who are qualified to throw guns against Henry Plummer."

"Who are they?" she asked quickly.

"Charley Reeves is one. He was one of the two fellows that were banished—supposedly—for shooting up the Indians. He's back in town now, by the way, he and Moore. Charley's almighty fast with a gun, faster than Plummer, I suspect. The other man, if you want to know, is your humble and obedient servant. If it ever came to a showdown, I could kill either Reeves or Plummer before they even got their hands on their guns. That's merely a statement of fact—don't let it alarm you."

She changed the subject quickly.

"What did the doctor have to say about Mr. Plummer?"

"Old Glick? That sawbones took one look at the arm and said it would have to come off, right now, above the elbow. Henry wouldn't let him do it, and when Glick told him he'd die Tex Crowell took a hand and informed Glick that he'd better see to it that Henry didn't die—he'd never get a chance to lose another patient, said Crowell."

"That arm"—Ann shuddered—"looked simply horrible."

"It did," Jesse agreed. "Henry Plummer's healthy, though, and I think he'll stand a fair chance of pulling through—I've seen men get well from what looked to me to be worse wounds."

"I certainly hope he does get well, if only for the sake of the girl he's going to marry. He's such a gentleman—all the women like him. I think I'll make some broth and take it over to him."

"I wouldn't. Henry's a gentleman, if you say so, but he manages to pick some pretty tough friends. Half the roughs from Yankee Flat are milling around that cabin of his—it's no place for a woman."

"I'm surprised to hear you say that, Jesse. He's been getting his meals at Bottom's, and Rose said—"

"Who?"

"Rose—Mrs. Bottom."

"Is that her name?"

"Yes. What's the matter with it, Jesse? Why are you laughing?"

"Rose. Rose Bottom. Ann, please tell me—does her husband ever call her Rosie?"

Henry Plummer did not die, and his right arm, although crippled almost to the point of uselessness, was saved. Although no action was taken, Crawford's deed was condemned even by those who had voted him into office as sheriff. The Yankee Flat ruffians took no direct action either, but they talked loudly of the revenge Plummer would exact as soon as he had recovered from his wound and of the brief period for which Crawford might expect to live if Plummer died. Crawford, frightened from the very beginning, became panicky. Plummer had barely begun to mend and was still far from convalescence when Craw-

ford, on March 13, departed for Great Salt Lake City as a passenger in Clem Talbot's wagon.

Bill Fairweather did not go with Talbot on that trip. He declared that winter would break early and that the ice would be gone from the streams long before Clem returned from Utah. He drew his pay and for nearly two weeks resisted any temptation to buy himself a big drunk. His money, he declared, was a stake to finance a prospecting expedition on which he would start as soon as weather permitted; in the meantime he would spend money only for food. His resolution was not equal to the strain of the idle days, and late in March he embarked on a drinking bout and within forty-eight hours had spent every cent he possessed. He was nearly sober and savagely morose when Jesse Minor found him.

"A fellow came over from Deer Lodge yesterday," Jesse explained, "and he brought this letter for you. He left it at the corral."

"Open it and read it to me, will you, Jesse?"

"Sure." As Jesse unfolded the single sheet a small wad of tissue paper dropped into his hand. He held it and read the letter.

"Dear Friend Bill: I got a good thing and am letting a few of my good friends in on it. Take a look at the inclosed and tell me how you'd like to see a bar running with stuff like that all over the bottom of the pan. We are leaving here just as soon as the ice starts to go, so get up here before that time ready to put in your share toward the outfit since we'll need packhorses and grub for a long trip. This is the real thing, Bill. You'll never get another chance like it. Hoping to see you I am, Your Friend, Tom Cover."

"What's he mean by the inclosed?" Fairweather growled. "Gawd, Jesse, my mouth tastes like a coyote had littered there."

"This, I imagine." Jesse unfolded the bit of tissue. In it was a single nugget, half the size of a pea, of yellow gold. Fairweather groaned.

"Wouldn't that happen to me? If Grasshopper Crick was runnin' with it, Jesse, I couldn't find the price of a tin dipper."

Jesse did not reply immediately. He turned the small nugget in his palm, then tested it with the point of his knife. The yellow metal yielded before the steel.

"It looks good, Bill. Who is this fellow Cover?"

"Feller I know. It's good, all right—Tom wouldn't 've sent f'r me if th' whole proposition wasn't good. Jesse, I got t' raise a grubstake!"

Jesse said, "Uh-huh," thoughtfully, and Fairweather gripped his arm.

"Jess! Yuh mean y'll play on it?"

"I don't see why not. Your friend Cover's the first man I ever heard of that sent a sample of what he expected to find. I've gambled on thinner propositions—how much do you figure you'll need, Bill?"

"I'll need . . . le's see, I got a hoss an' I got guns an' I got blankets. Tom says packhosses an' grub. . . . I'll need two hundred an' fifty dollars an' twenty dollars. Kin yuh raise it, Jesse?"

"I guess so—but why the two amounts, Bill? Why don't you just say two-seventy?"

"'Cause I'd be lyin', that's why, an' I won't ever lie to th' man that grubstakes me. I need two-fifty f'r th' grubstake, Jesse, an' twenty dollars t' git drunk enough t' taper off on. Give it t' me that way, an' I'll know I've got twenty dollars drinkin' money, an' I won't touch the grubstake. Otherwise I wouldn't be responsible—I'm burnin' up f'r a drink right now."

Jesse counted the money, in mixed gold and greenbacks, from the funds in his belt. "There you are, Bill. Twenty dollars for drinking."

"An' not another dime! Yo're a good man, Jesse. You'll have half share in anything I bring back, or I'll stake two claims for yuh jest as close t' Discovery as I c'n set th' stakes. Shake on it!"

Chapter XIV

I

FAIRWEATHER WAS DRUNK when he left Bannack. He admitted it, loudly, to the men who held his horse for him in the T-M corral while Bill deliberated as to which foot he should put in

the stirrup. He was, he said, drunk and broke; but the money he had obtained from Jesse Minor was belted about his hairy belly, and no portion of it had been spent for liquor. As he galloped eastward on Main Street, he roared his own improvisation of a song popular in the days of the California gold rush:

*Just take your time, Miss Ella,
Take your time, Miss Ella, do;
Just sit an' rock the cradle,
And I'll bring the gold to you.*

And he interrupted the song only to shout ribald farewells to those who stepped out of the warm saloons and braved the cold to watch him pass. Some suggested that he be trailed and brought back to town and be set on his way again when he was sober and in better condition to face the long ride over the Divide to Deer Lodge Valley, but nothing came of the talk. "If it was any other man, yes—but, hell, that's Old Bill Fairweather!" Snow lay six feet deep on the level, the depth of the drifts along the trails and in the mountains was any figure that one might put upon them, the mercury hung stubbornly well below the zero point, and only the calendar held any promise that winter was waning.

Bill reached Deer Lodge on the third day after he left Bannack. Only he could have told how he and his horse avoided freezing to death during the two nights in the open, what they ate, or by what instinct they followed the heavily drifted trail along the Big Hole and across the Continental Divide. He was sober and hungry, and his weary horse was ravenous when he plodded across the flats below Marston's and climbed to the Deer Lodge bench. He had never been in Deer Lodge before, but he stabled the horse with Marston and found, with the instinct of a homing pigeon for its loft, the one place in the straggling settlement where liquor was sold. One drink, only one, and as the raw whisky bit at his empty stomach he spoke to the bartender.

"I'm lookin' f'r Tom Cover—you know him?"

"Yep—ain't seen him today, though." The man spoke cautiously. "What might you want to see him about?"

"Tell him Bill Fairweather's in town—from Bannack. Where c'n I git somethin' t' eat round here?"

"'Cross th' road and about a hundred yards west. You'll see a little sign that says California Eating House. Tom Cover, he's camped with some other fellows down in the willows. I reckon I can find a boy to go down there."

Bill looked at the bottle, then pushed it courageously to one side. The one drink was already reminding him of how little he had eaten since leaving Bannack. He crossed to the restaurant and gorged hugely on fried venison steak, fried potatoes, and coffee. There Cover found him. Another man, older and with a dark beard heavily salted with gray, accompanied Cover.

"Shake hands with Henry Rodgers, Bill," he directed. "When did you get in camp?"

"Been here since one drink an' a pan of grub." He sopped the gravy with his bread. "I come jest as soon 's I c'd raise a grub-stake, Tom. I got two hundred and fifty dollars and a good horse."

"Two-fifty ought t' be plenty. There wasn't that much hurry, though. We won't be pulling out while this weather holds—will we, Henry? Not where we're going to!"

Rodgers shook his head. Bill Fairweather snorted.

"Yore letter said t' git here 'fore th' ice was outa th' cricks. Spring 'll come early an' with a rush. Last week I heard a b'ar turn over in his den an' a snake gittin' ready to uncurl himself in th' rockslide on Colorado Gulch. I smelt th' thaw an' here I be. What's in th' cards, Tom?"

"Maybe a heap, maybe nothin'." Cover turned to the older man, Rodgers. "Don't listen too hard to Bill, Hank—that's just the way he talks. He's a good man in the mountains, or I wouldn't have sent for him."

"Yo're thinkin' I didn't hear that b'ar!" Fairweather exclaimed. "I did so hear him—an' th' snake, too. And if I didn't smell th' thaw why did I cut short th' best drunk I've had started in two years an' come over here?"

"When will she thaw?" Rodgers interjected. Bill answered without hesitation.

"Water'll be runnin' free in th' cricks, an' th' ice'll be leavin' th' rivers in ten days—that'll be th' twelfth of April less'n I've lost count."

"Plenty early—earliest I've ever heard of in this country," said Rodgers doubtfully.

"What did ye ask me for, then? Come April twelfth you can call me a liar—mebbe."

"Henry's curious, Bill, that's all," Cover remarked. "He's got good reasons for asking. Henry knows the mountains, too. He was with Governor Stevens in '53."

"An' Grover," Rodgers added.

"That's right. He's trapped out of Fort Benton, Bill, and he's been to the big lake at the head of the Yellowstone. Barney Hughes knows him—"

"I know Barney," Fairweather cut in. "Is he up here?"

"Sure. He's in with us. Barney and Harry Edgar and Bill Sweeney and me and Rodgers here. There's a place for you if you want to take it. That's why I wrote you." He glanced around the room, now hazy with the mingled smoke of cooking and of three pipes. There were no other customers, and Louella Granger, who ran the establishment, was safely distant in the lean-to which served as kitchen. "I sent you that one little nugget, Bill, just t' prove we had something. Show him what you got, Henry, and let him make up his own mind."

"If my mind wasn't made up a'ready," said Fairweather, "I wouldn't 've come here, would I?"

Rodgers tugged a buckskin sack from an inner pocket. In the sack, carefully wrapped in rags, was a four-ounce medicine vial, wide-mouthed, nearly three-quarters full of gold dust and nuggets. The dust was extremely coarse and granular, the majority of the grains being almost as large as the head of an ordinary pin; the largest nugget measured a third of an inch in its greatest diameter.

"Where'd ye git it?" Fairweather could not keep the excitement from his voice.

"I traded fr it," said Rodgers. "I traded a good Yager rifle fr it with a Crow Injun on th' Musselshell. It come from th' Yellowstone country—I'll tell you that much—and I know where."

"Yellerstone's Injun country." Bill made the statement as he turned the largest nugget with his finger. He'd never seen a richer sample. If this Rodgers wasn't lying—and why should he lie?—the place this gold came from would be another Comstock. Better than the Comstock. That was a quartz lode, and you never saw your gold until the quartz had gone through the stamp mills. This was placer stuff. All one had to do was shovel through the top gravel on a likely bar and then pan the sand. A bar as rich as this—Jesus Christ Almighty! You could pan that in one hand and pick out the gold with your fingers like you'd pick sarviss berries off a bush! He raised his head and stared at Rodgers.

"I've prospected on th' Tongue an' th' Big an' Little Horn Rivers," he said slowly. "They run to th' Yellowstone, an' th' Sioux there is plenty hosstyle. They c'd stomp out six men easier'n stompin' on a nest o' pissants. Y' figgered on that any?"

"Th' Sioux stays east of th' Big Horn," said Rodgers. "You ought to know that. We'll be a long ways west of there." He tamped the tobacco into a short pipe and scratched a match on the table top. "There's all sorts of Injuns in that Yellowstone country," he continued conversationally. "There's Crows, but they've always been friendly with whites. Up to the headwaters of th' river, round th' lake an' th' steam-jet country, there's only Sheepeaters—some kind of Shoshone that's got less fight in 'em than prairie dogs. Th' Blackfeet, in gen'ral, stays pretty well north of th' Yellowstone, and th' Sioux country is all east of—of where we're goin'."

"Y' seem t' know all about it." Fairweather separated one of the larger nuggets and caught it between his thumbnail and the table.

"I been huntin' an' tradin' an' packin' all through there for close on fifteen years. Knowin' 'bout it has saved me my ha'r."

Bill brushed the gold carefully into a pile and ladled it back into the bottle with the blade of his knife. He shoved back his chair.

"Whut's keepin' us, then?" he demanded. "We c'n likker some t'night, an' t'morrer we c'n git an outfit t'gether. Injuns 're all holed up like b'ars this kind o' weather—it's th' best time of th' year there is f'r travelin'."

2

The six left Deer Lodge with the ice which for months had winterbound the creeks. Six men with saddle horses and three pack animals. The date was April 12, as Bill Fairweather reminded them often and profanely. He was quite sober. Rodgers was taking no chances of a drunken man's babbling informing the natives of Deer Lodge of the sample in his possession or of the direction of their quest. He and Tom Cover had compelled Bill to turn over to them the two hundred and fifty dollars he had brought from Bannack and had thereby assured his sobriety. They told questioners that they planned to prospect certain ledges of decomposed granite which Rodgers, trapping, had noticed along Madison River on the eastern side of the Tobacco Root Mountains. If there was no quartz in the granite, they said, they would continue their prospecting along Adams River or the Stinking Water.

Spring was burgeoning in the land, though denied by the heavy snow which still covered the peaks and lay in drifted windrows across the trails. Water trickled from beneath all those drifts, however, swelling the creeks to murmuring life; willow buds were softening, and Bill Fairweather, cocking his shaggy head toward the south, swore that he heard robins in the land. On the third night out from Deer Lodge they camped close to a rock slide which was already bared of snow, and Bill moved his blankets to the colder southern bank of the creek. There were snakes in the rocks, he declared. They were already

stirring, and he preferred the snowdrifts to sharing his bed with a rattler.

"They won't bite me, though," he added. "I c'n set plumb on a rattler, an' all he'll do is grind his tail. I'm just a-tellin' you fellers f'r yore own good."

Hughes swore at him, and the five pitched their beds on the sun-warmed bank close to the rocks; but the next morning Rodgers whispered to Tom Cover.

"I'll brain y' if y' say anything to Bill Fairweather about it," he said, "but a couple of minutes ago I went back of the point of rocks yonder, and so help me there was a big rattler sunnin' himself. I could've shot his head off easy, but damn if I was goin' to give Old Bill a chance to crow over me after what he told us last night. Say, how does he know those things? He's no old-timer."

"Not by a long shot. Folks call him Old Bill, but he won't see thirty for a couple of years yet. He's always claimed he could hear things and see things that other folks couldn't. He got into a drunken argument once, and the other fellow slapped his face and dared him to fight. Bill stood there and shook his head like an old bear. 'No,' he said, 'I can't fight a man that's dead already. Come Sunday you'll be underground.' He was, too. They found him dead in his blankets that Saturday morning. I saw that happen, Henry—you can figure it out for yourself."

They camped on the Passamari, the Stinking Water, where Harry Edgar was shown the sample of gold and told of their real destination, then followed a nameless creek to its head in the northern end of the Tobacco Roots and crossed to the Madison Valley. Another divide to the Gallatin, and then two days through the mountains, bitterly cold, to a bank-full tossing stream which Rodgers said was the Yellowstone. They were now in the country of the Crows, the Absáraka or Sparrowhawk people, a Siouan tribe which had been estranged for many years from the Dakotas. Twice as they worked their way down the Yellowstone they saw smoke columns sullyng the blue sky, and once, at the mouth of a creek, they found pony tracks stamped

deep in the mud and horse-droppings that were scarcely an hour old.

They maintained no guard. Fairweather rubbed his nose with a moistened forefinger and declared the whole country stunk of Indians, and Rodgers reminded him of the traditional friendship between the whites and the Absárika. This was all Crow country, of course there were Indians about—and a band of roving Sioux caught the six flat-footed!

It was morning; the horses were grazing in the creek bottom; Bill Sweeney, whose turn it was to cook, was cutting bacon; and Rodgers was dragging wood to the fire when the horsemen rode over the hill and clattered down the slope upon the six. One moment they were alone, the next they were separated one from another by mounted men in buckskin and agency blankets who crowded close to fire and packs and men.

For a few seconds all was confusion. Rodgers dropped the log he was carrying, stooped instinctively to pick it up, and between the legs of an Indian pony saw Tom Cover, on hands and knees, staring stupidly at the painted and feathered apparitions. The pony's legs were white, and painted in red on the white foreshoulder was the outline of a human hand. Rodgers raised his eyes to the man who rode the horse. He saw moccasins with a narrow band of beadwork across the toes, fringed buckskin leggings, and a man's body muffled to the chin in a blue army blanket. The Indian's face was unpainted except for an inch-wide band of vermilion which ran from ear to ear and across his upper lip. His left hand held the rein which was knotted about the pony's lower jaw; in his right was the slender shaft of a warhawk, the stone-headed battle-ax of the Plains tribes. The various details registered instantaneously upon Rodger's consciousness, as one sees nail holes in a board revealed by a lightning flash. He shouted to his companions above the noise of the restless hooves and the voices of the Indians.

"They're Sioux, fellers. Keep yore hands off yore guns an' git t'gether soon 's we can. We got t' bluff it out."

A young man slid over his horse's shoulder and ripped the

cover from a tin which Sweeney had taken from the packs. His hand was deep in the sugar when Sweeney, with a bellow of rage, booted him on his naked buttocks and sent him sprawling. He jumped up, his hand flashing to his knife, but Fairweather had pushed through the press to Sweeney's side and was grinning ferociously at the Indian. His long teeth snapped through the red screen of mustache and beard.

All had happened while Henry Rodgers was straightening his back. The ponies were quiet now, merely stamping nervously instead of plunging and pawing as the reins dragged them down. At first the Indians had seemed to number hundreds; now Rodgers was able to count them. There were but twelve, all of them men—which was bad—but odds of two to one were nothing if he and his companions could get together and face the reds. He moved around the white horse and edged toward the spot where the saddles and packs had been piled. His gun-belt was there, hanging on his saddlehorn, and in the holster was his .36 caliber Colt's Navy. He recalled gratefully that only the day before, after being splashed to the waist while fording a creek, he had drawn the charges and replaced them with fresh and placed new caps on the nipples. Six shots there, if he could get to them, and twelve more in Bill Fairweather's long-barreled .44s. Harry Edgar had only a little .31, but at close range that was deadly.

Shooting was bad, though. It would be better all round if they could get out of this mess without shooting. There were always other Injuns in the hills, and a fight, even if you won, meant that you'd have to get out of the country on the high lope; and maybe you wouldn't do it without more fighting where somebody might lose his hair. It was a hell of a long way to run to the Missouri and a hell-longer way to Fort Benton, and that was the only way they could run unless they doubled back and found a Crow camp and maybe roused the Crows up to jump this bunch of Sioux that didn't have no business west of the Big Horn anyways. Better try to bluff it out and save the fighting until there wasn't anything else to do. Sioux were bad medicine and always had been. This bunch didn't seem really

hosstyle, though. About half of them were off their ponies now, but just standing round like they were waiting for somebody to open the ball. Maybe they weren't wanting any of it with odds of two to one. Somebody was sure to get hurt—killed more'n likely—and Injuns thought different from whites. In a fight a white man always thought that he personal would come through even though the fellows on either side of him bit off a big chunk of bad luck; the big thing in an Injun's mind was showing off how brave he was but coming out with his skelp all in one piece. An Injun figgered every gun was aimed at him personal, and he played it that way. There was one older man in that bunch of Sioux, and maybe he'd show some sense and—by God, Bill Sweeney was talking to the Injun. He remembered Bill had said he could talk some Sioux, but he hadn't dreamed he could talk it that good. Mebbe, while they were listening to Bill's talk . . .

He sidestepped an Indian who was paying close attention to Sweeney's words and snatched his revolver from the holster on the saddlehorn. He thrust the gun into the waistband of his trousers and pulled his vest down over the butt, then edged slowly forward until he stood behind Bill Fairweather and could listen to the jabbering.

"You savvy some Sioux, don't you, Bill? What's he sayin'?"

"Shut up!"

Sweeney knew sign talk, too. When he couldn't think of a word he lapsed into the graceful gestures understood by every Indian of every tribe and subtribe from the Mississippi to the mountains. It was a language in itself, as flexible as any spoken tongue, as capable of meaning and gradations of meaning.

"My father and his young men are a long way from their homes," said Sweeney calmly. "This is the country of our friends, the Crows. We white men have not crossed the Big Horn."

"Where are the Absáraka?" the old Sioux demanded.

"They are in their camps." Sweeney volunteered no more definite information. The question made it clear that he and his friends had probably encountered a raiding party, out primarily

to steal horses from the Crows but turning aside from nothing that might promise adventure or an opportunity for the young men to count coup. "The bellies of the Absáraka," Sweeney added, "have been thin through these cold moons."

He studied the old Sioux carefully. He could not place him in this party. Horse stealing—and all Indian warfare had that as its basis—was primarily a business for the young bucks who had yet to prove themselves.

"You are diggers. You dig the hillsides and the creeks for gold." The old man knew prospectors when he saw them, and the picks and shovels were in plain sight against the packs.

"We dig within the lands of our friends, the Crows," said Sweeney. The Sioux ruminated over that information, and Bill Fairweather wheeled to snarl at a young brave who pulled at the canvas covering of one pack.

"We are not alone," the leader of the band said at last. "We are from the lodges of Standing Eagle of the Kiyuksa Oglalas on the Creek of Many Little Stones. Tall Elk is there, and the medicine lodge stands above the red bush"—this last was utterly incomprehensible to Sweeney—"You will come with us to that camp."

3

The six white men walked. The odds against them were reduced when two of the young bucks left the party and rounded up the saddle and pack animals, but victory, no matter how easily gained, would leave them afoot in a region which they now knew had been invaded by hostiles. In this year, 1863, the frontier from St. Joseph to the mountains was quiet. True, emigrant trains joined forces for safety; the mails moved from station to station along the Overland Route under escort of troopers of the Eleventh Ohio Volunteer Cavalry; there were sporadic horse-stealing raids on stage stations and cavalry outposts; but the Bozeman Road was undreamed of, and the Sioux were undisturbed along the upper Missouri and the Yellowstone west to the Big Horn, established by the tribes as the boundary between the hunting grounds of the Dakotas and the

lands of their linguistic cousins and blood-enemies, the Crows. Fort Reno, Fort Fetterman, and Fort C. F. Smith were yet to be built in the domain which treaty assured to the Sioux "so long as grass shall grow and water run"; and at Fort Laramie, in command of all the Ohio troops east of the mountains, was Lieutenant Colonel William O. Collins, who entertained the idea, most peculiar in a military leader, that his duty was to maintain some semblance of peace and that this end was best accomplished by treating the Indians fairly. Henry Rodgers had been at Fort Laramie during the previous autumn, and he strove to calm his companions.

"The Sioux ain't been hellin' round much," he said to Fairweather, "and I don't reckon this bunch are really lookin' for trouble. Keep your shirt on and pass the word to the other boys to do the same, and we'll bluff this business through yet."

"They got our hosses—"

"All the more reason for not startin' nothin' till we git 'em back. We'd best go 'long quiet—just 's if we'd intended to all along."

"An' as soon as we turn our backs on this camp them red thieves will be back robbin' th' packs," Bill persisted. "Thar's sugar an' r'baccy there, an' they know it. Whut they don't steal they'll kick round in th' dirt an' spile. Hyar comes Cover an' Edgar—let's see whut they say. We got our guns, an' I'm fr locking horns with these red sons o' bitches right now!"

He stood with legs a-spraddle, his head thrown back, his long hair streaming in the breeze which set down the creek bottom. His thumbs were hooked in the crossed belts which supported his revolvers. He stared at the old Sioux, who returned his gaze as steadily and made no move to interfere as the white men gathered and discussed swiftly the situation to which their own lack of vigilance had brought them.

"He got us by th' short hairs, and he knows it." Sweeney thus summarized his talk with the red leader, and the older, more experienced Rodgers nodded agreement:

"We'd best go 'long to th' camp. It really don't look extry bad

f'r us. He ain't made no real war talk, an' they ain't tried t' git our guns 'r tie us up 'r shove us around any. If they'd wanted t' rub us out they had chance enough t' come down on us like a hawk on a young rabbit."

"I'd like t' see 'em try t' git my guns!" That was Fairweather.

"Go easy, Bill. Lissen, all of you. Our play now is to go 'long quiet and not make any breaks until we see there's no other play open or until we c'n git our hosses. A fine kittle we'd be in if we were afoot out here with a couple of hundred Sioux combin' th' hills f'r us 'cause we counted coup on a passel of their friends."

The white men kept close together on the march. The tracks of their own horses and of the mounts of the Indian herders were stamped deep into the soil of the rolling benchland between the scene of their capture and the watercourse which the old Sioux had called the Creek of Many Little Stones. The old man rode at the head of the party nor glanced back toward the whites. Two of the younger Indians rode with him, two more on either flank beyond accurate pistol range, and the others were in the rear of the party. Rodgers and Sweeney, more conversant than the others with Dakota custom, talked in low tones as they walked; Harry Edgar, Tom Cover, and Barney Hughes kept close behind them, exchanging a word occasionally with one another but in the main listening to the older men. Fairweather kept to himself, several rods behind his companions. Once Rodgers halted, then stepped carefully aside.

"Watch where you're goin', fellers," he warned. "There's a big rattler under that sagebrush. Don't none of ye risk startin' things by wastin' a bullet on him, though. These Injuns might not stop t' find out what y' were shootin' at." A moment later he sidestepped again. "Gawd A'mighty! Spring's come f'r sure—thar's another!"

None of the five saw Bill Fairweather stoop and grasp first one snake, then the other, and stuff them within the bosom of his loose shirt. He handled them as carelessly as he would angle-worms.

The Sioux camp occupied a grassy meadow of some ten acres

within the loop of a meander of the creek. Fifteen or twenty lodges—and Rodgers nodded a certain degree of satisfaction. Lodges meant women and children, and there could have been no better proof that Standing Eagle of the Kiyuksa Oglalas was not leading his people upon a war raid. No warrior would condescend to labor so unmanly as raising or striking a lodge. Warriors rode alone, unimpeded by women, and slept curled in their blankets under a tree or in the lee of a clump of sage.

"Mebbe they're friendlies," Rodgers hazarded, "out a-tradin'—"

"Who with?" Sweeney growled. "They're miles north an' west of all their friends. This here's Crow country, an' north is Black-foot; an' hell's a skatin' pond if either of them was ever friendly with Sioux. I can't figger it, Henry. It'd seem a sight more right an' regular if there wasn't no lodges n'r no women."

There was no opportunity to solve the mystery, if one actually existed. The Indians on the flank and in the rear drew closer as the party approached the lodges and—once within the village—shielded the white men from the sullen stares of the women and the shouted gibes of small boys. Dogs—the starved, wolfish curs of the Indians—ran forward, first to yelp at the horses, then to bark furiously as the scent of strangers struck their nostrils. Cover swung his boot into the ribs of one bold cur and knocked him head over heels among his fellows. Some of the warriors grinned at the fight which followed and at the shrieking squaws who belabored the dogs with sticks snatched from the nearest woodpile.

The party's horses were driven through the village and turned to graze with the Sioux pony herd on the flat where the hill dropped to reach the river meadow; the six white men were hustled to a lodge which stood at the midpoint of the elongated crescent of tepees. One after another the six ducked through the narrow opening and stood in the dim interior. As their eyes became adjusted to the half-light they saw that no fire burned in the lodge. In the center, where the lodge fire would ordinarily have been placed, a bush had been planted. A low bush, almost

globular in shape and covered with tiny bright red buds just bursting into bloom. It glowed there like a great heap of coals, and the thought came to Rodgers that in all his journeyings through the mountains, at all seasons, he had never seen a bush with those red flowers. On impulse he stepped forward, held his hands above the scarlet blooms as he would above the red coals of a fire, then rejoined his companions. There was no comment from the Indians nor any change of expression on the faces of the men who sat shoulder to shoulder about the western edge of the lodge, opposite the doorway. They were old men, all of them, and their wrinkle-seamed faces were as blank of emotion as so many granite boulders. Rodgers edged forward until he stood at Sweeney's shoulder.

"How's it line up?" he whispered.

"I've quit guessin'—r else I ain't started; I dunno which. It don't make sense, none of it. What're these fellers doin' here in th' Crow country with their wimmin along? This here"—he barely twitched his hand to indicate the lodge and the grave men—"looks like they're makin' medicine—but what kind?"

The old Indian who had led their captors spoke at length and quietly. His account of the meeting with the white men was added to by a younger buck who had been with the band. The young man was more excited. Twice in the course of his speech he raised the stone-headed warhawk which dangled from his wrist and pointed toward the little group of whites.

"I still can't get it," Sweeney whispered again. "I c'n talk some Sioux, but when they get t' speechifyin' like that th' talk comes too fast f'r me. Th' fat feller with th' red beads on his shirt is th' boss here, Standin' Eagle, an' I think th' one beside him is th' feller our friend yonder called Tall Elk. Seems like he's some sort o' medicine man; but he's a warrior, too, an' that ain't what ye'd call usual by a long shot. Th' gang ain't extry friendly—but you don't expect any Sioux t' shake hands an' call you pardner."

Tall Elk rose and walked three times around the red bush. He was dressed in yellow-tanned buckskin unadorned except for a narrow band of porcupine quills, stained crimson, about his

throat. His hair dropped in tight braids over his shoulders, each braid tied at the end with a bit of buckskin. He wore no head-dress, no feathers with tufts to record coups counted or honors gained. Only a boy who had not yet won admission to the lowest rank of a warrior society would dress so plainly—or a man so laden with honors that there was greater honor in ignoring them. On his third circuit of the bush he halted and raised his hands high toward the smoke vent in the apex of the lodge. Bill Fairweather shifted from one foot to the other.

"How long's this goddam foolishness gonna keep up?" he demanded loudly. The older Indians paid no attention to the interruption, but several of the younger men turned angrily.

"Shut up, Bill!" Rodgers growled. "Ain't yuh got sense enough t' know we're in a jackpot?"

"Jackpot, hell!" Fairweather's rumbling bellow could have been heard far beyond the lodge. He spoke over Rodgers's head to Sweeney. "Bill, start talkin'. Tell these fellers t' quit this crow-hoppin' round an' give us our hosses and let us git outa here—'r else I'm gonna pull up that goddam bush an' belt somebody over th' head with it!"

"Bill! F'r God's sake—"

Standing Eagle spoke angrily to a young man beside him. The warrior leaped to his feet and started across the lodge toward Fairweather.

"Close in, boys—back t' back!" Rodgers commanded sharply, but Fairweather pushed the old trader to one side. His hands darted to the bosom of his shirt, and he dragged out, one in either fist, the two rattlesnakes he had picked up during the march to the village. The warmth of his body had roused the snakes from their springtime lethargy, and they coiled quickly about his forearms. Their tail-tips were an indistinguishable blur, and the harsh, dry sound of the rattling filled the lodge. The angry Indian drew back. Even Tall Elk retreated a pace.

"Makin' medicine, are they?" Fairweather roared. "Tell 'em white men can make medicine, too—big medicine. I'll show 'em!"

He hopped forward, head bent, feet lifted, in grotesque imitation of Indian dancing. He held the snakes loosely and carelessly. Their flat heads darted from side to side, but they made no attempt to strike him. As he neared the seated Indians the restless motion of the two heads ceased. The snakes drew back, crowding their stout bodies into S-shaped curves against the support of his hands, then they lashed out—mouths at full spread, long fangs protruding from the dead-white gums—at the nearest of the seated braves. The grave equanimity of the Sioux vanished, and those in the front ranks stumbled and fell over their comrades in the rear as they scrambled toward the wall of the lodge. Fairweather whooped with laughter and circled the red bush in mocking parody of the medicine man's dignified stride. Tall Elk stood his ground, and Bill lowered his head, wagged his bushy red beard toward the Indian, then suddenly lifted his hands and thrust the snakes almost into the face of Tall Elk. It was more than even a holy man could endure. Tall Elk whirled and ran, and Bill Fairweather dropped one of his snakes, kicked the red bush out of its bed, and with the bush flogged the medicine man and the remaining Indians out of the tent. The earth floor was painted with the scarlet buds.

"I said I'd belt 'em over th' heads with it!" he shouted. "Bill, you tell 'em t' git our hosses an' git 'em right now, or I'll braid these here two snakes into a whip an' frail th' stuffin' outa every Injun in this camp. Medicine, heh? I'll make their medicine for 'em! Wagh!"

4

"We'll git our stuff packed soon 's we can an' hit the trail," Rodgers shouted as the six—mounted now—trotted swiftly over the trail they had walked a short time before. "Them Injuns 'll git their nerve back, an' when they do th' place f'r us is a long way from here." He half turned and saw Fairweather at his horse's flank. "You still got them damn snakes, Bill?"

"I shore have!"

"F'r God's sake throw 'em away! Y' give me th' creeps!"

"I will not throw 'em away—not till I'm good an' sure I

won't need 'em ag'in. I didn't see yuh creepin' none when them Injuns brung up our hosses an' told us f'r God's sake t' git out. Did y' see 'em watchin' my shirt? Couldn't take their eyes off it, none of 'em. Get their nerve back, will they? Let 'em. Let 'em come. Let th' whole Sioux nation come after us. I'll make bigger medicine than th' whole outfit of 'em, an' I'll run 'em clear back t' th' Big Horn!" He shrieked in a wild parody of the war whoop, then suddenly sobered. "Better keep yore eyes skinned f'r more snakes, fellers," he said seriously. "We might need 'em."

Tom Cover, riding beside Fairweather, laughed.

"Didn't I tell you Old Bill was a ring-tailed whizzer, Henry?" he shouted.

"Yuh didn't tell me enough—not half enough. He's a sure-fire son of a bitch, that jasper—a star-spangled sizzler of a son of a bitch!"

Only Fairweather opposed the suggestion that they leave the Yellowstone region with all possible speed and abandon the search for the Absáraka gold until a less dangerous time. Later in the season, Rodgers said, Crow hunting parties would be roaming over much of the territory west of the Big Horn. If the Crows were moving round, the Sioux would stay where they belonged, and he, Henry Rodgers, would still give half his share in any possible discoveries to know what that bunch of Sioux was doing so far west even now.

"Makin' medicine," Bill Fairweather declared. "Yuh told us so y'rself. I c'n make medicine, too. Gimme two more snakes—'r even one if'n it's a big one—an' I'll bluff out every Sioux 'tween here an' Fort Pierre!" His horse topped the last rise as he was speaking, and Bill looked down on the scene of the capture. "Jesus!" he exclaimed. "What didn't them bastards do to our packs?"

All the possessions they had left behind had been looted, but playfully rather than systematically. The bedrolls had been opened and the blankets tossed into the dirt, several flour sacks had been slashed with knives and the contents spilled. Tom Cover's rifle, the only long gun in the party, had been carried

away. Two flasks of powder were gone, the sugar to the last grain, and all the tobacco save that which they had in their pockets. Harry Edgar, who put aside his pipe only when he ate or slept, cursed that loss more than any other.

They packed speedily and left the scene of the camp, turning away from the Yellowstone and following a creek valley toward the distant mountains. The trot slackened to a walk as the horses picked their way up the slope. Sweeney halted at the summit to scan the back trail but saw no signs that indicated pursuit.

"Looks like yuh bluffed out that bunch, anyway, Bill," he admitted, "an' I can't say I blame 'em f'r not bein' in any rush t' trail us. I damn near run myself when I saw yuh swingin' them snakes around. Y' say they won't ever bother yuh?"

"Nope. Look here." Fairweather dropped the reins around the saddlehorn and dragged one of the snakes from his shirt. With his free hand he deliberately slapped the viper on either side of its head, nor did he move his fingers to avoid the lightninglike strike which might be expected to follow such familiarity. The snake did not strike. It jerked its head angrily from side to side, and the air vibrated with the dry sound of its rattling. The horses snorted and shied, and Fairweather roared with laughter as his companions fought their frightened mounts.

"Throw them goddam things away!" Rodgers shouted. "Quit that schoolboy playin' round, and let's git outa here."

Fairweather did not release the snakes. He stuffed the one he held back into his shirt and glowered sulkily at Rodgers. The older man turned his back on Fairweather and conferred briefly with Sweeney. He remained behind when his companions rode on and did not overtake them until late in the afternoon when they camped far toward the headwaters of the tributary stream with the more level terrain of the Yellowstone valley lying below them like a map spread upon a table. Cover cooked what passed for a meal. Rodgers did not speak until after he had eaten.

"We saved th' bacon, an' it looks like we saved our hair," he said at last. "It could 've been worse."

"We ain't bein' trailed, I take it," Sweeney remarked.

"Couldn't see a sign of hide 'r hair 'r pony dust. There was smoke back where I marked down their camp t' be, an' it looks like they've settled down f'r a spell." He pulled a plug of tobacco from his pocket, and his lips moved as he calculated. With the point of his knife he marked upon the plug lines which divided it into eight approximately equal portions. "Reckon we'd best make f'r Bannack," he said aloud. "That'll last me through—'r near it." He whittled a meager pipeful and returned the plug to his pocket. Fairweather belched and spat into the dirt with which the fire had been smothered.

"What did y' do with them snakes?" Rodgers demanded suddenly. "Damn if I'm goin' t' try t' sleep with—"

"He let 'em go, Henry," Barney Hughes interposed in his thick brogue. "He turned 'em loose in the rocks about five mile back and stayed behind so none of us would break their backs with a club. Will y' tell me, Bill, how you found out you could ever play with snakes without getting stung?"

"Shore. Mebbe y'd call it an accident. I got drunk in Julesburg once"—he licked his lips reminiscently—"Chris', I wish I was drunk now—an' I come to th' next mornin' out on th' prairie 'bout a mile from th' corrals. I started t' git up, and then I lay down again. There was a big rattler—he looked t' be 'bout fifteen feet long—curled up right on my belly, an' then I seen another one up ag'in my side. I'm tellin' yuh them mountains yonder ain't keepin' no stiller than what I did. Th' likker poured outa me like runnin' outa a busted demijack. I was sober in ten minutes, an' I hope I'm never quite that sober again. I thought of a gun; but I didn't have one, an' then I thought that I couldn't have used it anyway 'cause while I was a-shootin' one of them th' other would 've been bitin' a hunk outa my ribs. Th' mornin' was kinda coolish, an' they wasn't in no hurry t' leave a warm bed an' go walkin'; so I just lay there an' sweat an' prayed that somebody would come along an' git me outa that pickle, an' then I prayed they wouldn't 'cause I couldn't see they'd do anything but git them snakes riled."

"Y' lie as fancy as Old Jim Bridger," Rodgers interrupted

drily. "Go ahead, Bill. Tell us y' lay there till y' starved t' death."

"I didn't no such thing. I bet it was more'n an hour, though, 'fore I figgered that th' only thing I c'd do was t' coax th' one on my belly t' move off, an' then mebbe I c'd roll over real quick an' git outa th' other feller's reach. I got a good hold on my nerve an' sunk my teeth in it, an' then I started easin' my fingers under that big rascal an' jest boostin' him a little. Every time I moved him he jest grunted an' settled down again, an' fin'ly I had both hands clear under him an' was jest about t' give him a heave that'd land him in Texas when he took a holt on my wrist with his tail an' lifted his head an' looked at me—right in th' eyes, he did—like he was sayin' 'Well, pardner, now it's yore move ag'in!'

"Fellers, I hope God'll strike me dead if that ain't th' truth! He as good as told me right then that he didn't have no notions 'bout gettin' hosstyle, an' t'wasn't long 'fore I seen he really meant it. I moved my hand out from under him an' held it up in front of his nose, an' he never even sighted on it like a snake will when he's settin' hisself t' strike. An' when I tickled him on his belly he liked it. I knew it when th' other one come climbin' up an' wanted his belly scratched, too. Then I—"

"Shut up, f'r God's sake!" Sweeney threw his blankets aside. "It's enough to have to think about snakes without all these lies 'bout belly-rubbin'. Maybe if we hadn't had a goddam snake charmer along we wouldn't have run into this hard luck. Two hundred mile from no place, broke, short of grub, an' plumb afoot for t'bacco. If yuh don't shut up, Bill, I'll rap yore teeth in!"

From beyond the dead fire old Rodgers stirred. His lips parted but closed again as Fairweather made no attempt to reply to Sweeney's outburst.

5

They continued south for a day, then were turned to a westward course by forbidding mountains and the distant view of an impenetrable tangle of peaks beyond. They skirted the end of one range and crossed a northward-flowing stream which Rodgers declared to be the Yellowstone.

"We ain't sech a long ways from th' big lake," he said, "but

there ain't no sense goin' in there. Nothin' but lava there. We'll cut more west. Them's th' Gallatin Mountains yonder, an' th' Gallatin River's beyond 'em. Once we wet our feet in th' Gallatin we're close to th' home range."

All of the horses were barefoot now, and the party's speed was definitely limited by the endurance of the animals; the course was circumscribed by the terrain and the need of choosing camping places where water and grass could be found. From time to time they prospected, but with little expectation that their labors would be rewarded. There was too much lava rock in the country, Rodgers declared; the granites "lay wrong," and there were no signs of the outcropping of decomposed quartz for which even the most ill-informed prospector kept his eyes open. They teamed up, as will any group of men thrown together by circumstance: Fairweather and Harry Edgar, youngest of the party; Barney Hughes and Tom Cover; Henry Rodgers and Bill Sweeney. They left the Gallatin behind and crossed to the valley of the Madison. There they saw quartzites and quartz-bearing rocks for the first time, and they found traces of gold. There were faint pencillings of yellow dust across the black sand in the bottom of the pans and an occasional tiny grain which could be picked up with tweezers. The gold was spotty, however, and one pan showing color would be followed by a dozen which were as barren of gold as a basket of pine needles.

"It don't look like it's worth while," Rodgers gave judgment. "I kinda liked the looks of that one ledge, but we ain't got time t' fool with it. We're still more'n a hundred miles from Bannack, an' grub is gittin' almighty low. Let's shove along."

They crossed the river and slowly climbed the eastern slope of the Tobacco Root Mountains. Beyond that range was the broad valley of the Stinking Water—the Passamari—and comparatively easy travel to the Beaverhead and Bannack. On the morning that they left the Madison, Sweeney killed an elk with a well-placed shot from his revolver. It was a young bull, already beginning to put on flesh after the short commons of the winter months, and they breakfasted on fried liver and heart.

"Maybe our luck's changed," Sweeney exclaimed as he lashed the meat, rolled in the bloody hide, to his saddle.

"'Bout time," Fairweather grumbled. "We look like we've been left hangin' out all winter. There ain't a whole pair of pants in th' outfit 'r a boss that ain't limpin', an' if it wasn't f'r that ellick we wouldn't have enough grub t' fill a jackrabbit's belly. How close did we git t' that gold th' Crow told ye about, Henry?"

"I dunno." Rodgers was cautious. "Two days, mebbe; two 'r three."

"Wagh! Two days from gold y' c'd dish out with a spoon, an' yuh let a passel of stinkin' Injuns chase yuh outa th' country. We come prospectin', an' we ain't found enough color t' buy us one pipeful of th' t'baccy we're all out of. 'Bout time luck dished up some sort of change."

They made camp at the head of the pass and crossed the summit with the sun. There was different country on the western slope. Rounded hills, grass-covered, shouldered one another toward a deepening gulch that widened as it approached the Pas-samari. An antelope bounded away, his white rump-patches gleaming like silver in the sunlight. The flanks of the hills and the benches above the brawling stream were seamed with rotten brown granite and with quartz.

They angled to the northward, away from the cañon where the stream had its source, and followed a long ridge which promised easier traveling. The rough trails east of the Madison had taken severe toll of the horses. Several were limping, and one would have fallen behind if Fairweather had not led it with a turn of its stake rope about his saddlehorn. There was a long gash in the animal's flank, and the flies buzzed hungrily about the wound. They made an early camp, close to the bank of the creek, and Edgar stripped some of the belly fat from the elk's carcass and boiled it down with a fistful of wood ashes to a greasy salve with which he dressed the wound. Fairweather led the horses across the creek and staked them out in grass that was almost belly-deep. The four other men shouldered picks and shovels and marched upstream.

"There's a piece of rimrock stickin' up out of a bar over there," Fairweather reported to Edgar when he returned. "Get the tools, an' we'll go over an' prospect it."

He dug beside the outcropping and filled the pan which Edgar held.

"You been beefin' f'r a smoke f'r more'n a week," he said. "Go wash that pan an' see if there's enough in it t' buy a pack o' t'baccy when we git t' Bannack. I'll take another pan f'r m'self."

Gravel and bits of broken quartz covered the top of the pan. Edgar let the vessel fill with water and washed the dirt with a circular motion which at regular intervals flipped the worthless stuff over the side. The pan was still half full when he saw granular yellow dust on the surface of the darker sand, then a nugget as large as a small pea. A yell came from Fairweather, crouched over his pan a few yards below.

"God Almighty, Harry, I've got a scad here—how's yours?"

Edgar was panting.

"I don't know what you call a scad, Bill, but if you've got one I've got a hundred. Just come here and take a look at it!"

Fairweather pushed through the alder brush which grew to the water's edge. He crouched at Edgar's side, and together they panned out the dirt which remained.

"It's a strike!" Bill roared. "We hit it, Harry, we hit it! There's five dollars in them two pans if there's a cent. It's gold y' c'n take hold of with y'r two hands—gold plumb to th' grassroots! Let's git another sample, quick."

They took a third pan, and a fourth, then returned to camp and dried and weighed the gold. Twelve dollars and thirty cents! Call it three dollars to the pan, and they'd hardly scratched the surface. It was a strike that would make the Grasshopper diggings look sick; it was like the stories that were told about the North Fork of the American and the Yuba in '49. It was gold . . . gold . . . gold. . . . They sat and stared at one another, then Fairweather cocked his great head on one side.

"Here comes th' boys—don't say a word, now. Jest dump that

dust back in th' pan an' leave it there. I want t' see old Rodgers's face when he lays eyes on it."

The four climbed the bank and dropped their tools.

"Them hosses should've been moved," Rodgers growled. "What's th' matter with you fellows? Grub ain't started either, an' no fire built."

"Quit growlin'," Edgar retorted. "There'll be light for an hour yet, and since you fellows went prospectin' we thought we'd take a look at that bar over yonder."

"Find anything that looked good?" Barney Hughes asked eagerly.

"We started a hole but didn't get through the sand to bed-rock. It might be worth layin' over f'r a while tomorrow, though."

"Any color?"

"Some. I said it was maybe worth layin' over for, didn't I? It looks some better than what we panned over on th' Madison. Take a look for yourself."

Edgar pushed the pan forward with his boot. Sweeney was nearest and seized it.

"Salted!" he roared. "What game are you fellows tryin' t' run on us?"

"Think it's salted, do you?" Edgar grinned. "If it is I'll take any claim you got on this crick, Bill. You can pipe Fairweather an' me both down an' run us through a sluice-box, and you won't find a color. What you see there is just four pans out of that bar! We've hit her, boys! We've hit her!"

Henry Rodgers was the only one of the four who did not yell. He waited until the first rush of interest had passed, then took the pan between his knees and examined its contents minutely. He walked to the stream and inspected the outcropping which had first attracted Fairweather, then straightened and for five long minutes let his eyes roam over the gulch, upstream and down. He marked the dip of the quartz ledges, the width of the narrow benches that marked the location of the stream bed in years past.

"Well, what do you think of it, Henry?" asked Hughes.

The older man turned slowly.

"What day's today? You ought t' know, Edgar, from that diary you keep."

"It's the twenty-sixth. May the twenty-sixth, eighteen hundred an' sixty-three. What's that got t' do with it?"

"We'll never forget it—none of us. It's th' day th' Fairweather Strike was made. Tobacco money . . . Holy Jesus!"

Chapter XV

I

BOB DEMPSEY was probably the first man in Bannack to learn of the rich strike in the Tobacco Roots. Fairweather and his companions halted first at Dempsey's, were fed, and for the first time in many days tasted tobacco. No one knew who told Dempsey or to whom the former rancher relayed the news, but the room was crowded long before the hungry men had finished their meal. Fairweather pushed through the crowd and, with Tom Cover, walked to the Minor cabin. Jesse Minor looked up from a month-old copy of a San Francisco paper.

"You've hit it at last, haven't you, Bill?" he said. "Sit down and tell me about it."

Fairweather—never wholly at ease in Ann's presence—bowed stiffly and introduced his companion.

"I reckon," he said sourly, "we might 's well have hired a band an' carried signs. We weren't goin' t' tell nobody but a few fellers we c'd trust t' keep their mouths shut, an' yet th' news is goin' over town faster'n a grass fire c'd spread. Some of them fools 've got their hosses packed a'ready."

"It's printed on your faces," Jesse chuckled. "The pair of you look like a couple of kids on Christmas morning."

"That's jest what Dempsey said," Cover remarked. "He took one look at Henry Rodgers, and then he grabbed him by the arm and wanted to know where it was and how good it looked."

"Well? Where is it, and how good does it look?"

"It's east," said Fairweather cautiously, "east of th' Stinkin'

Water. An' it looks better than anything I ever heard tell of anywhere. That's straight, Jesse. We couldn't take a pan nowhere's in that creek 'thout findin' color. I staked two claims f'r you—that's what I came here t' tell you."

Cover nodded.

"I seen him stake 'em—six an' seven above Discovery—but if you got any notion of holdin' 'em you better be ready to ride when we do. There'll be a rush that won't leave a man under eighty years old in Bannack, an' th' only way you'll hold a claim 'll be t' set on it with a gun."

Ann, from her chair on the other side of the stove, watched the man she had married.

"Beyond the Stinking Water . . ." Jesse repeated Fairweather's words. "If it had been the Madison you'd have said so. That means it's somewhere in the Tobacco—"

Tom Cover gulped audibly.

"Quit guessin' out loud!" he exclaimed. "This business has me scared, an' I don't care who knows it. By mornin' there won't be a man in miles of here that won't know 'bout the strike, and when we start back there'll be an army of 'em followin' us."

"You're right there," said Jesse. "You couldn't have picked a better time. The trails are open, there's water in all the creeks, and the fellows who get in on the first rush will have the whole summer ahead for prospecting. You and your friends had better start figuring right now on protecting yourselves."

"I told you!" Cover turned accusingly toward Fairweather. "Harry Edgar said the same thing, but you and Henry Rodgers were set on coming to Bannack instead of crossin' th' divide t' Deer Lodge."

Fairweather's red beard waved like a battle flag.

"I'll hold my claims," he said savagely, "an' there's nobody in Bannack c'n stop me." He pulled a tobacco sack from his pocket and poured its contents in Jesse's hand. The gold dust was coarse and bright yellow. There was one nugget as large as the tip of a woman's finger.

"We only put in one full day on th' creek," said Bill. "One

full day an' the shag-end of two others. Th' six of us panned better'n a hundred an' eighty dollars without even gittin' a good look at th' bedrock. Th' whole damn—'scuse me, Mis' Minor, I ain't seen a woman in so long I f'rgit myself—th' whole crick comes down over quartz that's so rotten you can mash it in your fist. A man c'd git rich dippin' th' sand in a sieve."

Jesse spread the yellow nuggets on the table and tested one of the larger with the point of his pocket knife.

"It looks good, Bill. It's better colored than anything that came out of the Comstock in the early days. Comstock gold had so much free silver running with it that the fellows used to come over the mountains and buy California gold to mix with theirs to make it brighter. I wish Henry Plummer could see it—he knows silver."

"He wouldn't find none here." Fairweather defended his discovery. "I've been t' th' Comstock, Jesse, and I know silver-rock when I see it jest as good as Henry Plummer does. Take a sample if'n ye want to an' show it to him. There's plenty more where it came from."

He flipped the big nugget across the table, and Jesse wrapped it carefully in a piece torn from the shipping page of the *Alta California*. He slipped it in the pocket of his flowered vest where Ann found it and—several years later—had it set in a scarfpin which Jesse wore all his life.

"I'll pay you back from my first pan, Bill," said Jesse lightly. "I can't show it to Plummer, though. He's not here."

"No? Where's he at—r did he git into another shootin' scrape?"

"A fellow named Cupid shot him."

"Cupid? Must be a newcomer since I left here. You know anybody name of Cupid, Tom?"

"Jesse's trying to tease you, Bill," Ann interrupted. "He means that Mr. Plummer is in love. Last week—it was the twenty-fourth, wasn't it, Jesse?—he was elected sheriff of this district, and the very next day he started for Sun River to marry a girl there. Her name is Electa Bryan, and her brother-

in-law, Mr. Vail, is the government farmer at Sun River."

Fairweather nodded rather stupidly, and Ann saw that he was paying far less attention to her words than to the bottle and glasses which Jesse was placing on the table.

"One for luck!" said Jesse. "To Fairweather's luck and the gold of—what do you call the place, Bill?"

"Alder Gulch, Harry Edgar named it. Thar's a growth of alder in th' crick bottom thicker'n th' hair on a woolly dog. Y' drinkin', Tom?"

"Sure." Cover drank quickly, one motion carrying the glass to his lips, the next returning it to the table. He stepped closer to Ann.

"This girl that Plummer's marryin', Mis' Minor—d'you know her?"

"No. Mr. Plummer had dinner here with us the night before he left for Sun River. He told us about her then."

"H-m-m-m," Cover sucked noisily on a long upper lip. He seemed about to speak, then reconsidered and was suddenly dumb and embarrassed. Jesse and Bill Fairweather had poured another drink and were talking in rumbling undertones.

"Is there anything wrong, Mr. Cover?" Ann asked. A thought came unbidden to her mind, and she added quickly: "Do you mean that Mr. Plummer already has a wife in the States or in California—I think he came from there."

"No, ma'am; I don't know anything about that." Cover squirmed. "I was at Oro Fino a year 'r so ago, and—and I knew a man named Henry Plummer there. I was just wonderin'—it ain't anything a feller c'n talk to a lady about."

Jesse Minor cut in sharply.

"What he's trying to tell you, Ann, is that Henry Plummer ran with a pretty hard crowd—Cy Skinner and Bill Bunton and some of those fellows—on the other side of the mountains. He's dropped all that sort of stuff and is making a fresh start here. I'm not the only man in Bannack who thinks he ought to be given a chance."

He addressed his words to Ann, but his gray-blue eyes met and held Cover's.

"That's it," said the other heartily. "There were some pretty hard cases over in that Salmon River country, Mis' Minor. I—" He hesitated, then spoke deliberately to Jesse: "If this here Bryan girl at Sun River was my sister she'd wait a year 'r so before marryin' Henry Plummer. If you're a friend of his you can make anything outa that you want to."

The moment was pregnant with possibilities, but Jesse Minor grinned disarmingly and pushed the bottle toward Cover.

"Have a drink, Tom. Then we'll go downtown and find your friends and see what's due to happen. I'm betting there'll be a rush to this Alder Gulch that'll beat anything this country has seen since the Comstock. Drink to it."

It was very late when he returned, but Ann was waiting up for him. He smiled and dropped wearily into the chair by the table.

"I'm tired," he confessed. "There's nothing more tiring than standing around and listening to a lot of fools rant when they don't know what they're ranting about. You can't expect fellows like Fairweather and his friends to keep their mouths shut, but I wish they had."

"Everyone knows about the strike, then?"

"Every man, woman and child that's alive—worse luck. The fact that it looks like a really rich strike won't make any difference to the mob that'll pile out of here with Fairweather's crowd when they return to their claims. The whole country is ripe for a rush, and we'll see a real one. A gulch where six men pan nearly two hundred dollars by just poking round a little is big stuff."

"When are they going?" Her voice, as always now, was cool. It had been easy to learn coolness; she had only to imitate Jesse.

"Pretty soon. They've got to before some smart fellows do a little trailing. You wouldn't have to be an Injun to find the place where eight or ten horses cut into the trail along the Beaverhead. Some of the more sensible men in camp—men like Doc Bissell—are already talking about drawing up a set of miner's laws to which everyone joining in the rush will have to subscribe."

"You're going, Jesse?"

"I've got to—even if it's just to hold my claims and sell them to the first fellow who comes along with money in his pocket. I don't think I'll sell, though." He spread his fine hands on his knees and grinned at their cleanliness and the spotless linen of his cuffs. "I suspect that my hours of ease are at an end. In Alder Gulch I'll be a worker with pick and shovel. Shall I stake a claim for you, Ann?"

"No." She spoke quickly, and Jesse's lips twitched.

"You're the best judge. You won't have to dig to make money in Alder Gulch. Clem Talbot should be back by the tenth, and by that time there'll be a trail to the Fairweather diggings that will look like the Overland Stage Route. I'd suggest that you send Clem straight through—after marking up your prices just one hundred per cent over the Bannack rates."

She nodded gravely, mentally reviewing the lists which she and Clem had prepared. There were very few articles which could not be considered as necessities or desirable luxuries in a new camp. The freighting venture had been profitable beyond all expectation. Already the original investment had been restored, and the trip on which Talbot was now engaged would be clear profit—and a very handsome one if Jesse's surmise was correct as to prices to be obtained at the scene of the new strike. *I could take that money, and Clem could give me notes for all the equipment, and I could go away from here. I could go back to Ohio—I'd be a rich woman there—or I could go to California and . . .* She was suddenly desperately weary.

"You'll be busy, won't you, Jesse?" she said steadily. "Developing your claims and all the rest of it will keep you away from Bannack for a long time?"

"Yes." He shook his head regretfully. "Bannack was beginning to look like a town, too. That election was at least a start toward law and being civilized. Now, God only knows what might happen. This strike is rich, Ann. You've never seen a rich strike, and you don't know what it means; but it can turn a country upside down. Grasshopper Creek never has been really rich, but since you've been here you've seen a little something

of what gold can do to men. Just imagine a gulch that's ten—a hundred—maybe a thousand times as rich as Grasshopper."

She did not attempt to visualize the picture he presented.

"You'll be busy," she repeated. "You'll have many things to do, and you'll have irons in every fire that's burning over there. You won't need me. After Clem gets here I could close this house and go away." Her voice was steady; her hands, fluttering lightly, told more than her words. Jesse rolled a cigarette and flicked the dead match into the woodbox. He stood with his back to the stove, his coattails parted, his hands thrust deep in his pockets. The cigarette flipped up and down with the motion of his lips.

"Go ahead," he said, "but your going will prove a big nuisance to me."

"No, it won't, Jesse. You don't—"

"I know. I don't—and by the same token neither do you. The nuisance will be that I'll have to drop everything and follow you and bring you back. And I'll do it. If it means going to Ohio or Zanzibar I'll find you and bring you back to the mountains. Here's where this game started, and here's where it'll be played out to the very last card."

The cigarette end glowed as he took a final pull. He dropped the stub into the firebox.

"I'll pack my possibles before I sleep tonight," he said. "I don't think there's any chance that gang will get started as soon as tomorrow, but when the rush does start I'll have just about time to throw a saddle on a horse and join the parade. Good night."

"Good night, Jesse." She crossed to her own room and closed the door behind her. For a minute, two minutes, she stood listening, waiting. She heard only Jesse's tuneless humming and unidentifiable thumps and rattlings as he assembled his equipment for the trip. Once his footsteps passed close to her door, but they did not pause.

Ann Minor watched the rush from Bannack get under way in midmorning of June 2. Not from the uneven, irregular

sidewalks along Main Street but from the crest of the hill which overlooked Grasshopper Creek at the junction of the tributary gulch where James Morley had his claims. Bill Fairweather rode a gray mule which Bob Dempsey had given him to replace his exhausted horse. Near him were Rodgers and the others of the discovery party, a compact little group that was passed, wherever the width of the rutted road permitted, by those eager ones who were now assured that gossip had not been circulated deliberately to mislead them and that the new eldorado really lay to the eastward. Later, along the Beaverhead, misgivings would return, and those foreriders would come racing back to satisfy themselves that the main body had not crossed the river to the south or turned northward into the mountains.

Jesse rode immediately behind Dr. Bissell and Henry Rodgers. A loaded packhorse trotted easily beside him, putting no strain on the lead-rope which was looped about Jesse's saddlehorn. Jesse wouldn't have a horse that fought a lead-rope or one that would not permit him to walk to its head at any time, a bridle dangling openly in his hand. Ann saw the handles of a pick and shovel thrust beneath the lashrope of the pack. He was not jesting, then, when he said that his days of soft-fingered ease were ended and that at Alder Gulch he expected to work his claim as industriously as any of the hundreds of prospectors and fortune hunters who crowded the trail.

There were hundreds in the cavalcade which streamed down the steep pitch to Yankee Flat, crossed that area of disrepute, and converged at the head of the second descent to the gulch. Ann wondered if a dozen men remained of the male population of the Grasshopper diggings. Stores and workshops and claims and ranches would be deserted until those gold-seekers had proved the true worth of Fairweather's discovery. Men were like that. They'd follow the will-o'-the-wisp of gold even though they knew that the trail could end only in destruction. There was not one in that group who could not tell of other men who had died of thirst in the desert, or frozen in mountain storms, or perished miserably in a battle with Indians while seeking

some mythical stream whose waters flowed over golden sands. And now they had forgotten the dead men completely. There was David Evans, harnessed like a mule between the shafts of a light two-wheeled cart which was packed with blankets and food and prospector's tools. Evans had succeeded Henry Crawford as the town's butcher, and the shop would probably have made him as rich as any of the claims on Grasshopper Creek or its gulches. People had to eat—but Evans had forgotten that and had slammed the door of the shop to follow the mob to the mountains beyond the Stinking Water. There was W. B. Dance—that meant another closed store. She turned at the sound of footsteps among the loose rocks which covered the summit of the hill. Approaching was Rose Bottom, the woman whose name invariably set Jesse's lips to twitching.

"I seen you up there," she began, "and I says to myself that of all the women in Bannack only Ann Minor would go out there on the hill and away from everybody so that she could see the whole show."

"It is a show, isn't it," Ann replied. "I've heard of rushes; now I know what one is like. There won't be many men in Bannack for a while."

"And all the better for them that stay. My Abe got a notion he'd join in, but I'm tellin' you I got that out of his head in a hurry. Maybe bein' married five years should've got me over things like that, but I ain't ready yet t' find out what sleepin' alone would be like." She smirked. *Why did women seem to delight in hinting about—about things like that—and then, invariably, smirking like cats?* "I seen your husband goin' along with the rest of 'em," Mrs. Bottom continued, "an' I wondered how much of a fight you put up 'fore he got his own way. You ain't been married a year yet." *Again that smirk. Were the relations of married people so unspeakable?*

"Jesse had to go," she said quietly. "He grubstaked Bill Fairweather, you know, and Bill staked two claims for him, just above the Discovery claim. Jesse had to protect them."

"I reckon he did—and 'course he couldn't take you with

him." Rose stared at the column of riders and footmen. "Well, I see that the law"—she emphasized the word and sniffed—"is goin' to be represented at the new strike. There's two of them no-good deputies that Henry Plummer appointed, Jack Gallagher and Buck Stinson."

Ann murmured, "Yes." She knew the men by name and sight. They raised their hats on the rare occasions when she encountered them on the streets, but she never acknowledged the salutation. Plummer had appointed four deputies, and three of them Gallagher, Stinson, and Ned Ray—had been recruited from the questionable characters known as the "Yankee Flat bunch." Ray was probably no worse than the others, but the good women of Bannack crossed the street or stepped into a store when they saw him approaching. He shared a cabin with the notorious Madam Hall, whose establishment was never mentioned by those who lived north of Main Street. He was a handsome chap with long hair and a sweeping mustache and goatee. He walked with a noticeable limp, and it was whispered that he had been shot through the ankle in attempting an escape from the California penitentiary at San Quentin. Plummer's fourth deputy, Dillingham by name, was of a different stamp, a hard-working, earnest young man who was intent only on amassing a few thousand dollars and returning to the States. The new sheriff had been rather sharply criticized for his appointment of Ray, Stinson, and Gallagher. He had replied by offering to dismiss any one of them if the critic would himself assume the duties and the assurance of small pay and long hours and the possibility of having to kill some law-breaker or be killed himself. In each case the critic had refused, hastily.

"I wonder what Mr. Plummer will say," Ann speculated, "when he comes back and learns of all that has happened since he left. I don't think he'll even hear of this rush until he gets to Rattlesnake."

"He won't let it worry him," Mrs. Bottom declared. "He's bought a house jest cross-lots from where you live, Ann, and I'll bet he'll put his new wife in it jest as fast as he can. Y' know, I think Henry Plummer's a pretty brave man."

"What makes you say that?"

The last of the gold-seekers had reached the gulch road, and the rush, so far as Bannack was concerned, had departed. The two women walked slowly across the gravelly hilltop toward the houses.

"Well," said Mrs. Bottom, "if I'd been Henry Plummer I'd 've kept right on goin' with my new wife until I got to Fort Benton, and I'd 've put her on the first boat that come in and headed back fr th' States. I wouldn't have brought her to Bannack where sooner or later she's bound to hear all the stories that're goin' round."

"You mean the gossip that's repeated about Mr. Plummer?"

"What else could I mean? You've heard it too, and you can't tell me you haven't."

"There's no reason she should hear any of it," said Ann hotly, "unless some very mean and gossipy woman repeats it to her. Mr. Plummer admitted frankly to Jesse that he'd been thrown with a pretty hard crowd on the other side of the mountains, but he said he'd put all that behind him and had come here to make a fresh start. I think we all ought to help him."

She was angry and did not hesitate to show it. Mrs. Bottom's small, pale eyes shifted.

"Just exactly what I think myself, dearie, and it's just what I told Mis' Shaw no longer ago than last night. Live and let live—that's what I say." *And there's plenty of talk about your own husband, too, so don't try putting on any airs with me. Everybody knows that he's killed at least one man and that he's gambled all over California. You act like some of us were dirt under your feet, but if anybody asks me I don't think Jesse Minor's a bit better than Henry Plummer or any of the rest of them.*

The rush had not reached Alder Gulch before Bannack, seventy miles from the new diggings, was seething with rumors, some of them amazingly accurate. The women remained in Bannack, nor had all the men joined the cavalcade. Some remained to tend their stores and their ranches and to continue

their work on their claims in Grasshopper Gulch. The little group of slovenly Bannack Indians did not desert their wickiups on the edge of Yankee Flat. No one knew or attempted to inquire how and where the rumors originated, but the inexplicable telepathy of the frontier told the people of Bannack of many of the circumstances of the march to Alder Gulch. They knew that the rush had camped near the Beaverhead Rock and there adopted a code of miners' laws to govern the establishment of new claims; that no one except those of the discovery party and a few of their trusted friends had known they had reached Alder Gulch until Harry Edgar turned in his saddle and said casually, "This is it"; and that before nightfall of June 6 the gulch had been staked from its mouth all the way to the crest of the divide.

A town sprang up about the location of the first strike—one of many towns which were to be built in the narrow ravine of the Tobacco Roots. One of the miners returned to Bannack for supplies and related that sympathizers with the Confederate cause had named that first town Varina in honor of Varina Anne Banks Howell Davis, wife of Jefferson Davis. That name had endured for only a few days. Dr. G. G. Bissell, elected judge of the district and an ardent Unionist, had flatly refused to sign any documents in a town named for the wife of the rebel leader. When such a paper was presented to him he calmly ran his pen through the objectionable title and wrote in the name, "Virginia City."

"That's southern enough to suit any rebel!" he declared.

As Jesse had prophesied, the trail to the new strike speedily became a plainly marked road. Travelers from Bannack followed the Beaverhead to a point just below the famous Beaverhead Rock, landmark since the days of Lewis and Clark, and crossed the benchlands to ford the Passamari, or Stinking Water, at the point where Bob Dempsey established his Cottonwood Ranch. From there the road swung southward across the ridges which shouldered down from the Tobacco Roots. The town of Junction was scarcely out of the lowlands. Then followed, one after the other, Adobetown, Nevada, Central, Virginia City, Pine Grove,

Highland, and Summit. The whole gulch was one long town strung along a single street.

Clem Talbot reached Bannack and pushed on immediately for the new diggings. When he returned, his wagons empty, Jesse Minor was with him, and it was then that Bannack received concrete evidence of the tremendous wealth of the Alder Gulch placers. The two men brought more than ten thousand dollars in shining yellow dust and nuggets, and of that amount nearly a fifth was Jesse's own, product of the two claims which Fairweather had staked for him. Jesse was as weary as a man can possibly be. He was unshaven, his hands were grimy and blistered, and his clothes were filthy with the chocolate-colored mud of the creek; but his eyes sparkled as he thumped upon the table, one after another, the buckskin sacks into which he had sewn his treasure.

"First money I've really made with the toil of my hands and the sweat of my brow since I used to cut cordwood for old man Crockett. And this is only the beginning, Ann. Those Tobacco Root Mountains are lousy with gold, lousy. Fellows that couldn't find claims in Alder Gulch are prospecting other gulches and are making strikes as rich as Fairweather's. I've grubstaked some of them. I'll lose on some—maybe!—but just one strike in gravel half as rich as Fairweather's Bar will wipe out a heap of losses.

"Those hills full of gold were standing there when Lewis and Clark marched along the Beaverhead. And after them came the Fur Brigade—Jim Bridger and 'Bad Hand' Fitzpatrick and those fellows. They trapped all the streams in this part of the country when they weren't running from the Blackfeet, and not one of 'em ever turned a shovelful of sand. If they had they might have changed history, but they didn't. No, the gold in those creeks waited for Old Bill Fairweather; it passed up good men and bad for a half-crazy drunken bum. Don't ever tell me that God hasn't got a sense of humor!"

"Jesse!"

"It's true. I can prove it by something else that happened in Alder Gulch. A fellow named McFadden went out there with the first rush. He's been around Bannack all winter, and he's

earned the name of Bummer Dan. He bummed his meals, and he bummed something to smoke, and he bummed drinks from anyone who would stand for it. Well, that sort of stuff doesn't go in a new camp, and the boys told him to quit his bumming and go to work—to stake a claim and dig like all the rest of us. 'Dig anywhere,' somebody told him. 'Up there is as good a place as any'—and he was shown a bench in a side gulch. It was thirty feet above the level of the creek and about as likely a place for gold as a bird's nest would be. There were good, hard-working men in that camp who had staked likely claims and worked hard developing them and yet hadn't found a color—and it was their luck to see that bummer go up to a worthless looking bench and push a borrowed shovel into gravel as rich as any that had yet been found in Alder Gulch. The first lick of work he's done since he came into the mountains had made Bummer Dan McFadden a rich man. You can't explain away things like that by calling them 'luck,' Ann."

Clem Talbot was crouched over the ashpan of the stove, carefully scraping the bowl of his pipe. He raised his head as Jesse finished speaking.

"Yo're a fine one to be speakin' light of luck, Jesse," he said, "after what y' seen with yore own eyes jest a couple of days ago. If Haze Lyons an' Charley Forbes wasn't plumb shot with luck, I'd like to know! If it weren't f'r luck th' pair of 'em w'd be swingin' three feet clear of th' ground right now—an' maybe Buck Stinson along with 'em."

"Them!" Jesse snorted. "Except that it was the women that turned them loose instead of the men, what happened to Forbes and Lyons was the same that happened to Charley Reeves and Bill Moore right here in Bannack last January. There are men that have the nerve to pull a gun but not enough to shoot and kill—crowds are the same way. There's a difference between sentencing a fellow to hang and doing the actual hanging."

"That feller Biedler would've hanged 'em," Clem remarked. "He an' Dick Todd had th' gallows built an' th' graves dug, an' was all set f'r a necktie party. Y' should've heard Biedler cuss when Stinson an' Lyons hightailed outa th' gulch."

"But what happened?" Ann demanded. "I saw Stinson—the deputy—in town this morning. He was on Main Street talking to Henry Plummer."

"Henry's back, is he?" Jesse inquired. "When did he get in?"

"Day before yesterday, quite late in the evening. His bride was with him. Some of the women called on her yesterday, but I thought I'd wait until she was settled in her new house."

"Day before yesterday, was it?" Jesse addressed his next remark to Talbot: "You heard that, Clem? It clears Plummer of Lyons's charge that he killed Dillingham on Plummer's orders. I'm going downtown and see if I can find Plummer now. I'd like to talk to him."

"Please!" Ann protested. "What on earth happened? I can't make head or tail of what you're saying."

Jesse halted halfway across the room.

"It looks like Henry's appointment of Dillingham didn't suit his other deputies," he said. "They ganged up on him and killed him. Clem saw the whole show—he'll tell you about it."

He lifted his hat from the peg by the door and left the house. Talbot, as though accepting a cue, started talking immediately. Ann learned that Dillingham had come to the new town of Virginia City and had been accosted by Lyons, Forbes, and Stinson. A few words had been exchanged; then three shots had been fired, and Dillingham had fallen. He died as bystanders carried him into a tent used as a gambling house and laid him on a roulette table. A meeting of angry miners decided to try the three immediately, but Forbes won, on a technicality, a separate trial. The trial of Lyons and Stinson was brief, and the two were sentenced to hang. John X. Biedler and Richard Todd were appointed executioners, and the killers were chained in one of the cabins while the gallows was being erected and graves dug. In the meantime, the miners' court proceeded with the trial of Forbes.

"He got himself off, Miss Ann," said Talbot. "He's a fine looking young feller, an' he c'n talk smooth enough t' charm a bird off'n a bush. He was jest as guilty as the others, too. Shucks,

I saw him pull his gun an' slam a bullet into pore Dillingham, an'—jest as he pulled trigger—I heard him holler, 'Don't shoot!' He knew dern well that witnesses disagree and that there'd be men what had heard him holler who'd swear he hadn't done any shootin'."

"But if his gun had been fired, Clem—"

"That was another mixup. Jack Gallagher grabbed all the guns, an' when nobody was lookin' he loaded th' fired chamber of one of 'em. Dillingham had been hit three times, but there was only two guns that showed signs of bein' fired. Forbes made th' most of that, too, an' th' crowd voted to turn him loose. I'm tellin' yuh, he left th' gulch on th' high lope 'fore somebody changed th' crowd's mind for 'em."

"And you let him go, Clem? If you saw him fire the shot you should have testified."

"Me? No, ma'am, not me. Let Alder Gulch clean out it's own snake nests. I had too much of yore money in my pocket t' go stickin' my nose into that business. It was talkin' that got Dillingham killed. They say he told Jim Dodge an' Wash Stapleton that Lyons an' Forbes were goin' t' hold 'em up. Th' word got back t' Forbes somehow, an' he swore he'd git Dillingham if it was the last thing he done. I ain't takin' cards in that kind of a game, Miss Ann."

"Never mind," said Ann angrily. "What happened after Forbes was acquitted?"

Talbot grimaced. Instead of a hanging, he said, there had been a farce. Lyons and Stinson, mounted in a wagon where all could see them, headed a procession from the improvised jail to the gallows. Lyons was sobbing audibly, and a woman had screamed an hysterical command that the "poor young boys'" lives be spared. Other women had taken up the cry, and the friends of the condemned men had turned the interruption swiftly to their advantage. Blocking further progress of the wagon, they had held up the march to the gallows until a letter from Lyons to his mother could be read.

"Haze Lyons no more wrote that letter than I did, Miss Ann,"

said Talbot. "It was that drunken lawyer they call Judge Smith that wrote it, and he sure laid it on thick about how Haze w'd be a reg'lar saint all th' rest of his life if only he got another chance. It shore worked on that crowd, though."

Another vote had been called for, and when the decision seemed in doubt Jack Gallagher had leaped into the wagon and—pistol in hand—shouted that the verdict was for acquittal and that the men should be released. Another of the roughs had slashed the lariat which picketed an Indian's pony. Stinson and Lyons had leaped to the animal's back and galloped down the gulch.

"An' that was th' end of th' matter," said Clem. "I remember that when them fellers was turned loose here in Bannack last winter Jesse said th' town jest hadn't growed up yet. It looks like Alder Gulch has some growin' t' do 'fore it's ready f'r long pants."

Ann had lost interest in the misadventures of Lyons and Stinson.

"You said that the women wanted the two men released," she observed. "Have some of the men taken their wives to Alder Gulch, Clem?"

"Yes'm. Thar's quite a few wimmen in th' gulch now." His eyes rested on her still face for a moment, and he added quickly: "But don't you go gittin' any notions of goin' there, Miss Ann. Jesse done right t' leave you here in Bannack. Livin' in a wicki-up 'r a tent is all right f'r females like Sophy Barton, who was fourteen years old 'fer she knew there was houses where th' pigs didn't live in with th' folks 'r th' chickens roost on th' rafters, but it's not f'r a lady like you."

"Of course not, Clem," she said quickly. "I wasn't even thinking of such a thing." *I could do it, though. If you'd only give me a chance, Jesse, I'd show you that I could cook over a fire and sleep on a blanket spread on the ground. I don't think you want a woman to love you, Jesse.*

Clem made his excuses within a few minutes and left the cabin. He was never at ease there except when Jesse was present, and Ann offered no objection when he claimed that the weary

cattle in the T-M corrals would be neglected unless he were present to supervise the feeding. She closed the door behind him, glanced at the clock on the wall, and began the preparation of supper. She was setting the table when Jesse returned. He had been shaved, his unkempt hair had been trimmed and carefully brushed, and his clothes had been cleaned until even the deepest stains were scarcely perceptible.

"I feel a little bit more like a white man again," he said, and added: "I saw Henry Plummer."

"I hope you told him," she said severely, "of what Stinson and Gallagher have been up to in Alder Gulch. Clem told me all about it. I think Mr. Plummer should be ashamed of himself for appointing such men."

"I'm not in the reforming business, Ann. Henry came in Goodrich's while I was getting shaved—and we found other things to talk about than the shortcomings of his deputies. I walked home with him and stopped at the gate long enough to meet the bride."

"You did! Oh, Jesse, do tell me what she's like."

"A little bit of a woman, not much more than five feet tall, and if she wasn't married I'd call her a girl. I'll bet she's ten or twelve years younger than Henry. Big gray eyes and light brown hair. I'd call her pretty except . . ."

"Except for what, Jesse?"

"Except that she's not happy, that's all."

"Oh, she must be. After all, they haven't been married a month yet."

"She's not happy," Jesse repeated. "I'm not given to guessing, Ann, but if I was called on to make a guess it would be that Henry Plummer lost his good sense some time after matrimony overtook him and told his bride all about his past, without reservation. When she looks at him it's with the same expression that she'd have if she found a rattlesnake in her bed."

"You're imagining things, Jesse. I told you that several of the women had called on her. None of them said anything like that."

"No? Form your own conclusions, Ann. We're calling on

them tonight. I told Henry we would—seeing that I've got to hit the trail back to Alder Gulch in the morning."

4

Electa Plummer: How do you do. Mr. Plummer told me you were coming over tonight. . . . Yes, I think I will like living in Bannack. . . . It was very lonely on Sun River. My sister and I were the only white women for miles around. . . . The government is closing the farm there, and I think my brother, Major Vail, is glad. It will be fifty years, he says, before anybody can make a farmer out of a Blackfoot Indian. . . . He and my sister are coming to Bannack to live. . . . Won't you have another cup of tea, Mrs. Minor . . . ? Good night, Mr. Minor. Good night, Mrs. Minor.

"I don't think she's ever grown up," said Ann with unusual sharpness. "It was like pulling teeth to get a word out of her. If she's like that all the time I feel sorry for Mr. Plummer."

"Save your sympathy, Ann. The woman is frightened, I tell you. She couldn't have acted more frightened if there'd been a corpse in the bedroom which she knew she and Henry would have to carry out and bury as soon as we had left. I wish I knew the reason for it."

His curiosity was never satisfied. Months afterward Jesse Minor was able to guess, but no more, as to why Henry Plummer's bride had sat quivering in the home to which her husband had brought her, and why she started nervously when spoken to by her visitors. Jesse returned to Alder Gulch the day after that call and never saw Electa Plummer again. She remained in Bannack less than two months and then boarded the stage bound for Salt Lake City where she would transfer to the eastbound Overland coach. Had she made any intimate friends among the women of Bannack there might have been gossip, or even whispered scandal, about that separation after so brief a matrimonial experience; but Electa had sought no friendships, and a few women who knew that she was leaving accepted her story of

homesickness and a desire to visit the parents she had not seen for more than two years. The visit would be brief, and then she would return. Her sister and brother-in-law, who had come to Bannack, would keep house for the sheriff during her absence.

"She ain't said nothing about it," commenred Rose Bottom, "but I can give a mighty close guess as to why she's going. She's paler than a ghost, an' there's dark rings under her eyes. I'll bet you she's in the family way. She must've got caught the very first time."

"I'm sure I don't know—and I don't care to talk about it," Ann said very coolly. Rose stamped away. She had been ready to speculate endlessly upon the subject.

Electa's sister, Mrs. Vail, said nothing to contradict that bit of gossip. She strengthened it, in fact, by remarking that no date had been set for Electa's return but that she would undoubtedly spend the winter with her parents in Iowa. Maud Vail was ten years older than her sister and welcomed the social contacts which had been denied her at the isolated post on Sun River. There was no church of any description in Bannack, nor any clergyman, and Mrs. Vail organized the women into a group which met each Sunday evening to read from the Bible and to join in singing familiar hymns.

Three days after Electa Bryan Plummer left Bannack, a jury sentenced John Horan to be hanged for the killing of his partner, Lawrence Kelly. The two had quarreled over the division of gold from the claim they owned, and Horan had beaten his mate with a shovel, then shot him. Plummer, as sheriff, supervised the erection of two stout posts, with a crossbeam, on the edge of Yankee Flat, and Horan was hanged there the following day. Plummer was white to the lips when he returned to his home. Ann, who knew the nature of the task he had had that afternoon, offered to get him some of the French brandy which Jesse kept always on hand.

"Thanks just the same, Mrs. Minor," said the sheriff, "but I had one drink before that unpleasant job and another one after. I'm not a drinking man, but I had to have them. No more, though."

He stood in the open doorway, staring toward the naked, rocky hills beyond the gulch.

"A bad business," he said slowly. "I knew something like that might come up when I took this job, but I didn't give it enough thought, I guess. I'd have sold out without any argument if anybody had offered me two bits for the sheriff's office at noon today."

"Nobody will think any the less of you for doing your bounden duty," his brother-in-law remarked.

"I hope not." Plummer turned back into the room and sniffed the odors which came from the oven. "My, that smells good!"

"It's a cake," said Mrs. Vail. "Mrs. Minor had some fine white flour and soft sugar, and I got a dozen mountain-grouse eggs from an Indian, so we joined forces. Neither of us knows what kind of cake grouse eggs will make, but we'll find out pretty soon."

"If the smell means anything, it'll be prime," Plummer declared. He unbuckled his pistol belt and hung belt and gun on a peg in the wall above the couch where he slept. Ann noticed that he used his left hand. He had never regained completely the use of the right arm through which Henry Crawford's bullet had plowed, and he had painstakingly taught himself to shoot with his left hand. Jesse had practiced with him and had told her that Plummer's progress had been remarkable. Although he had never before used his left hand or eye for shooting, he had developed into a very fast and—equally important—an accurate shot.

"As good a shot as you are, Jesse?" she had asked lightly.

"Of course not, Ann," he had said, "and he knows it, as I took care that he should." She remembered that remark as Plummer hung up his gun. Jesse would never have hung a gun in a place where anyone who entered the cabin could cut him off from access to the weapon.

Plummer drew a cigar from his breast pocket and, after requesting her permission, lit it. The color was returning to his cheeks, she noticed. The tobacco soothed his taut nerves, and he smiled reminiscently.

"Are you a Roman Catholic, Mrs. Minor?" he asked.

"Why, no," replied the surprised Ann. "Why do you ask me that?"

"I didn't want to say anything that might offend you. There was something right funny happened downtown today—everybody's laughing about it."

"What was it?" asked Vail.

"Well, it seems that poor devil Horan was a Catholic, and he was all broken up when he found out he had to die and there wasn't a priest anywhere to hear his prayers. Judge Dance felt almighty sorry for him, but all he could do under the circumstances was to find another Irishman, Jerry Sullivan, and let him talk to Horan. Jerry's a good fellow, and he felt sorry for Horan, too; but he's a north-of-Ireland man, and he never had any more religion than a jackrabbit, so when Horan started crying and trying to drag him down on his knees he was up a stump for fair. Judge Dance heard the whole business.

"'You've got t' do your own prayin',' says Jerry. 'Don't ask me to tell you what to say. Just quit cryin' an' get down on your knees and ask God to forgive you all your sins. Ask Him as though you meant it, and I'll be damned if I don't believe the Old Fellow will do it for you!'"

Chapter XVI

I

SEPTEMBER.

Ann Minor: Those people who arrived a few days ago are going to stay here. They've bought two cabins—Crosbie's, next to us, and that house with the blue shutters just down the street from you. The older man is Judge Sidney Edgerton. President Lincoln appointed him chief justice of Idaho Territory, and he was on his way to Lewiston. The younger man is Colonel Wilbur Sanders. He's Judge Edgerton's nephew and was an acting

adjutant general when he was invalided out of the army last year. He's a lawyer. I seem to know all about them, don't I, Mrs. Vail? Well, the Edgerton's daughter, who is about thirteen, took it on herself to visit Rose Bottom, and it seems that she can talk almost as much and almost as fast as Rose can herself. . . . I think I'll call on Mrs. Edgerton and Mrs. Sanders tomorrow. Won't you go with me?

Sidney Edgerton: They seem like very pleasant ladies, my dear. Certainly Mrs. Minor is a lady. She comes from Ohio, too—from Painesville. It would be interesting to know how she ever happened to marry a professional gambler. . . . Indeed he is. His name is Jesse Minor, and right now he's at Virginia City. I am told that he grubstaked Fairweather, the man who found those gold deposits, and was rewarded with two of the richest claims in the gulch. His profession, however, is that of a gambler.

. . . This isn't Ohio, as we're learning every day. Can you imagine, in Akron, having the sheriff's sister-in-law and the wife of a professional gambler call upon you together. . . . And, while on the same general subject, I'd like to tell you about a trial I witnessed today. It was a civil case, a dispute about water rights, and the presiding judge saw that I was a stranger and interrupted the proceedings to welcome me and my family to Bannack. When I introduced myself he invited me to a seat on the bench. One of the jurors remarked that the occasion called for celebration, and the case did not continue until after liquor had been brought from the nearest saloon and served to everyone in the room. No, this is not Ohio.

Some of the men with whom I have talked seem to think that the community is trying to be law-abiding. They told me proudly that a man was hanged a week or so ago for murdering his partner, but admitted in the next breath that many other crimes had been permitted to go unpunished for want of definite evidence and identification of the guilty parties. There is a large group of known roughs and bad characters, but no man wishes to bring the gang's vengeance upon him by accusing any one

of them. I enjoyed a long talk with the sheriff of the district, Henry Plummer, who told me something of his difficulties in enforcing law in so large and unsettled a region. A man can be murdered in the mountains, and weeks may pass before the body is found. It was so with John White, the man who discovered these Grasshopper diggings. He and a companion were killed and robbed only a short time ago in the mountains northeast of here. The crime was not discovered for two weeks, and although the murderer—one Kelley—is known, he seems to have made good his escape to the west. Plummer seems to be an earnest man, and competent. Certainly he is a gentleman. Do you recall the little woman with brown hair and gray eyes who was on the stage when we met it at the Snake River ferry? That was his wife—on her way east to visit her parents.

Francis Thompson: You're late! You missed all the excitement. The roughs are getting rougher, and two of them held up the stage from Virginia this morning. . . . Just this side of Rattlesnake Ranch. Just two, but they got the drop on the five men who were riding the coach and took everything they had. Dan McFadden—yes, "Bummer Dan"—lost the most. They got something over two thousand dollars from him. . . . Don't ask *me* who. Dan and the other fellows recognized them, but they're not doing any talking. The sheriff tried to get them to name somebody, but they wouldn't say a word. Plummer asked them right out how they expected a man to be sheriff if that was all the help he got, but all Dan would say was that guessing wasn't healthy. He's right at that. No man likes to lose a couple of thousand dollars, but neither does he like a knife in his ribs or a bullet through his skull some dark night.

Bill Bunton was on the coach—the fellow that runs the stage station at Rattlesnake Ranch. He claims the road agents took a hundred and twenty dollars off him, all he had. . . . What're you laughing at? Same thing I am, eh? All right, let's both laugh, but nothing else. You should have heard Bill tell Henry Plummer that he didn't have the slightest idea who the two robbers were. His face was as straight as a preacher's at a funeral. . . . Is Bill's

brother, Sam, still around? He hasn't done a lick of work since God knows when, and I'm not the only one who's wondered where he gets the money to keep so drunk on.

Wilbur F. Sanders: If only the railroad had been extended as far as Salt Lake City, uncle! It would mean that you and I could get to Washington in three weeks, or very little more, and tell President Lincoln and Justice Swayne about conditions here. I wouldn't expect them to believe us, though. The conditions in those new towns in Alder Gulch are beyond all description—and belief! They are worse than anything I ever heard about San Francisco when the Vigilance Committee was formed there. San Francisco merely had a corrupt city government which failed to enforce the law. In Alder Gulch there is neither government nor law. It is sickening, sir, sickening. Men are robbed and shot and knifed every day, and nothing is thought of it. A Mormon trader was shot and killed the week before I arrived there, and the guilty men spent the money openly in the bar-rooms and gambling houses. The Mormon had a large sum in greenbacks, and several men recognized bills which had been in his possession.

I was told of two brothers named Chevalier who made a cleanup in Bevin's Gulch. They were going home—they were from Ohio, by the way—and when they missed Oliver's stage at the Laurin ranch they started for Virginia to get the Peabody & Caldwell coach. They have never been seen since, and they had several thousand dollars in dust in their possession.

The thought of retribution and punishment overtaking them never seems to enter the criminals' minds. They actually boast of what they have done and seem supremely confident that the miners will never organize and rise against them. There are plenty of decent men in the country, but they are all too busy with their claims or stores or ranches. Sooner or later something will have to be done; and in the meantime, sir, I think you should write again to the President and tell him that some form of territorial government must be established here, together with a separate judicial district.

Hannah Dale: It's terrible, Mrs. Bottom, just the most awful thing I ever heard of since the Mormons killed all those emigrants in '57. My husband got in from Lewiston late last night and told me, and if it hadn't been so late I'd have come over then and told you. As it is, I've left my breakfast dishes sitting on the table. . . . I'm telling you just as fast as I can. . . . There's been five men murdered and robbed in the Lolo Pass. . . . Nobody we know, thank God, but that doesn't alter things. The only one that's known is a man named Lloyd Magruder, from Lewiston, and it was him the road agents were after. He went to Virginia last summer and opened a store there, and he sold everything he had and then started back for Lewiston in time to get across the mountains before the big snows blocked the pass. He'd done well—it was said in Lewiston that he had more than fifteen hundred ounces of dust and a lot of greenbacks; and of course the road agents knew it. He had eight men with him, but he and four of the men were killed in cold blood, and the other four, that had done the killing, went on to Lewiston and took a boat down the river before anybody knew what had happened. Hill Beachy, the deputy marshal there, is following them, but Mr. Dale says they've got a long start on him and could be in California by now.

Here's the awful part of it, and don't you dare breathe a word to a living soul. Lewiston didn't know that anything had happened to Magruder until a man from Virginia got there and said that Magruder had left Alder Gulch a week ahead of him. What's more, my husband was told that this man had said that Magruder had asked Mr. Minor—yes, Jesse Minor!—to go with him, but Mr. Minor said he was too busy. He wasn't too busy, though, to leave Virginia the day after Magruder did, and he hadn't got back when this other man left there. He hasn't been in Bannack, you know that as well as I do, and I'd give something to know where he was—even if I could give a guess that would be close.

I know it isn't any proof, but there's others besides me, Mrs. Bottom, that think there's some very strange things in connec-

tion with all these robberies. Look at all the men that have been held up, and some of them killed; but nobody's ever heard of Jesse Minor being robbed, and they say he's taken as much gold out of Alder Gulch as anybody. That Clem Talbot came here with the Minors, and he's made goodness only knows how many freighting trips; and he's sold everything he had for cash, and he's not been held up either.

I don't like the Minors, and I never have, and I've never been so humbled that I wouldn't say so. They're too high and mighty, him and her both. Last winter, when no wagons could get through and everybody was on short commons for food, they were giving away flour and salt meat to just about everybody that came along—bummers and Injuns, and I even saw one of those awful women from the Flat get a sack of flour. And yet, when I came along, Jesse Minor stepped right out in front of everybody and says: "Your husband had plenty of money to buy whisky with in Hacker's last night, Mis' Dale, and I understand you've been trading pretty regular at the stores. This flour is for people who haven't got food and can't buy it." He shamed me. Right in front of some bummers and a couple of dirty Bannack squaws and a painted woman from down on the Flat. I didn't dare tell my man about it—he'd have gone for that Minor with a horsewhip—but I've never forgot it.

Leroy Southmayde: What else could we do? When you're looking into a shotgun at ten feet away, the only place you can put your hands is up in the air. They took me and Cap Moore for six hundred dollars, and then they told the driver to go ahead.

Henry Plummer: I think I know who it was that held you up, Southmayde. Wasn't one of those fellows George Ives?

Southmayde: You're dead right—and the others were Bob Zachary and Bill Graves—Whisky Bill. If I don't get them myself, I'll live to see them hanged!

George Bissell: My God, Leroy, why can't you keep your mouth shut? Your life's not worth a cent now.

Abraham Bottom: Now you just lissen to me for once, Rose. I don't care a damn—yes, that's what I said—I don't care a damn what the women of this town are saying about anybody, you keep out of all that talk and don't name no names. There's times when talkin' ain't healthy, and right now is one of them. I don't want to stop a load of buckshot just because of women's gossip. . . .

Do just as you like—it's none of my business if you women ain't speakin' friendly to Mis' Minor or Mis' Vail or invitin' them to evenin' sociables and such. Only don't say why you ain't invitin' them. The only way to pull through bad times is to keep your mouth shut and mind your own business. . . .

Sure I hear talk—a man 'd have t' be deaf an' dumb not to these days—but I let it go in one ear and out the other, and you'd best do the same. I don't know nothin', an' even if I did I wouldn't say so out loud.

Sidney Edgerton: Sit down, Harry. There's nothing to be frightened about now. Just start at the beginning and tell us exactly what happened.

Henry S. Tilden: I'll try to, uncle. This morning Cousin Wilbur asked me to go out to Horse Prairie and bring in that little bunch of cattle he had there. I had a lot of trouble finding them, and it was so late when I got them rounded up and down as far as Fortien's ranch that I knew I couldn't get to Bannack until after dark. Mr. Fortien let me take a fresh horse and said it was all right to leave the cattle there and come out and get them tomorrow. Being penned up for the night would quiet them down a little, too. Well, about three or four miles this side of Fortien's—it was getting dark fast then—I met four men on the road, and all of a sudden one of them swung his horse right in front of me. Another one pulled a gun and told me to throw up my hands.

Then they told me to get off my horse, and two of them got off and searched me. They didn't find anything because I didn't have a cent in my pockets or anything that a robber would want.

Then they got back on their horses, and one of them said they'd made a mistake and for me to go on about my business, but if I ever told anybody what had happened it would go pretty hard with me.

Buck Stinson and Ned Ray were the two men who got off and searched me. One of the others was Sheriff Plummer. I saw him as plain as I see you this minute. He was wearing that great-coat that you've seen him wearing, the one with the bright red lining. The fourth man I didn't know.

Wilbur Sanders: It was George Ives, the horse trader from the Stinking Water. He was in town and hanging around with Stinson and Ray all morning. They left town this afternoon, right after dinner, and a little later Henry Plummer was seen leaving. He was heading for Rattlesnake, though, not west toward Horse Prairie. He told George Chrisman he'd been asked to look at some prospects in Rattlesnake Cañon which might prove to be silver.

Sidney Edgerton: Which might have been a ruse. He could have doubled back easily enough and caught up with those fellows on Horse Prairie by the time Harry met them. But what does it prove, Wilbur? Not a thing, and you know it. There was no robbery, and the boy wasn't harmed. Plummer is sheriff of the district, and he was accompanied by two of his deputies. His story would be that he was seeking a criminal and that he ordered Ray and Stinson to halt Harry and search him. The word of four men against that of a sixteen-year-old boy!

Wilbur Sanders: They're after Sam Hauser. He and Nate Langford left town late today with the last wagon of that Mormon train. It's no secret that Hauser has money of his own and that he's taking fourteen thousand dollars in dust that belongs to Will Dance and Granville Stuart. He's to deliver it to their agents in St. Louis. Plummer was on the stage with Hauser when he brought the gold from Virginia City.

Sidney Edgerton: That's right enough. I was in Goodrich's when the stage arrived and saw Hauser take the gold out of his blanket roll and give it to Plummer for safekeeping. It was a clever move on Hauser's part, and I've got to say for Plummer

that he never turned a hair. Witnesses were present, and he knew that he had to guard that gold and deliver it to Hauser on demand. He put it in Chrisman's safe. You've still proved nothing, Wilbur.

Wilbur Sanders: No, but if Hauser should be held up tonight—by four men, let us say—Harry here might prove a very valuable witness. He must keep quiet about this. Remember that, Harry. You must tell no one about what happened to you today. No one.

NOVEMBER 22ND.

Henry Plummer: I'm giving a little dinner on Thanksgiving Day, Judge Edgerton, and I'd be honored if you and your good lady would be present. I've just come from Sanders's house, and the colonel and his wife have accepted. The Burchettes will be there, and I think Judge Dance and his wife. Francis Thompson and Joseph Swift, of course, and Mrs. Minor. I hope that her husband will be with us, too; but he is in Virginia City, and Mrs. Minor doesn't know if he's coming home for Thanksgiving or not. I can promise you good food, good drink, and good company. The turkeys came from Great Salt Lake City, a tom and a hen from the same brood so that we can settle once and for all the old question of which is the best eating. We've been fattening them ever since they arrived.

Sidney Edgerton: No one can resist a temptation like that, sheriff. We accept with great pleasure. . . . *I wonder if this world holds another man, guilty or innocent, with more of the devil's own cold nerve than that fellow possesses? Burchette, Sanders, Dance, and myself; he must know that we are among those who suspect him of robbery on the road, but he's as bland as a May morning!*

Ann Minor: Of course I'll help you with that big dinner, Maud. Goodness knows I haven't anything else to do. Since the weather's gotten colder it seems as if the women who used to be running in and out all the time have found other things to do and other people to borrow a cup of shortening from when

they're out of it. I know I've done nothing to displease any of them, but I don't think I've more than passed the time of day with any woman except you for a month. I'll roast one of the birds in my oven, and one of the men can run across with it when we're all ready to put it on the table. I do hope that Jesse will be here.

DECEMBER 16.

Rose Bottom: Oh, God bless you, Ann, God bless you. Dr. Glick got back this morning, and his wife sent him around right away. Abe was sleeping like a baby, and he hardly stirred when the doctor looked at him. He says Abe will be all right in a day or two, but that he'd 've died if it hadn't been for you. What ailed him was a stoppage of the bowels, he said, just as you thought it was, and if I'd given him the castor ile like I was goin' to it might 've ruptured his gut an' he'd 've died. The doctor says that what you done was the only thing that could 've saved him.

I'm a wicked woman, Ann. When I think of how hard you worked and what awful things you done without once complainin', I know how wicked I've been. It would've been God's jedgment on me—after the way I've treated you—if Abe had died. I won't be wicked no more, Ann. I humble myself to you and ask you t' forgive me. I won't listen to none of that evil talk no more, Ann. I don't care if your husband is one of the road agents; I owe you my Abe's life, and I'll always be your friend.

DECEMBER 24.

Clem Talbot: I can't stay f'r long, Miss Ann. I just come t' Bannack t' deliver a letter t' certain parties here an' t' bring you these here as a Christmas present from Jesse. It's a bearskin coat an' a hat t' match, an' you'll be warmer than a flea in a buff'ler robe no matter what th' weather is. Jesse shot two b'ars—bustin' big ones, too—in th' mountains up north of th' Beaverhead last fall. They were just fixin' t' hole up f'r th' winter, an' they was in prime coat. He found an Injun that was a top hand at tannin' an' a feller in Summit that'd been a tailor 'fore he went gold-

huntin' who c'd cut 'em an' tailor 'em. One fr you an' one fr him, an' there ain't a sweller pair of coats in th' whole country. Jesse was sure disappointed, Miss Ann. He wanted t' bring you that coat himself, fr Christmas, an' right up to th' time I left th' gulch he thought maybe he could. . . . I can't tell yuh why he couldn't come, Miss Ann. It's business, stricly private business—gosh, Miss Ann, don't go cryin' about it. I know yo're disappointed; but there's nothin' t' cry about, an' cryin' won't mend matters.

Yes'm, I'll eat with yuh, thank yuh kindly, an' then I've got t' ride. I'll git some sleep at Rattlesnake Ranch t'night an' make Virginia City t'morrer. . . . Thanks, ma'am. There's no likker no place c'n come up t' thet French brandy of Jesse's. Jest t' roll it on y'r tongue is t' know what God's savin' grace is like. Remember when we fust tasted it—you an' me? It was there in th' camp in Great Salt Lake City, jest after he'd run off them two fellers thet was tryin' t' run a sandy on yuh. Fust time I ever heerd of likker in cawfee. . . . Now yo're cryin' again, Miss Ann. I didn't go t' say anything t' make yuh cry. . . . Jesse? Of course he's all right, ma'am—w'd I be here talkin' t' you an' drinkin' his likker if he wasn't? You've heard about all th' hell that's been poppin' over in Alder Gulch? Well, it's just that Jesse figgers he's got t' stay there an' keep th' lid on.

Y' ain't heerd about it? That's funny. Folks here in Bannack all seem t' know about it. There's no secret about it. I c'n tell yuh everything while you're gittin' supper. Th' start of it all was 'bout three weeks 'r more ago when a feller named Thiebaldt got killed. . . . Of course not, Miss Ann. Jesse didn't have nothin' t' do with it. My land, you're as jumpy as a cat with her first kittens. If y'd given me a chance t' finish what I was sayin' y'd have knowed Jesse didn't have nothin' t' do with it. Jesse ain't one t' kill a man an' leave him layin' out in th' sagebrush.

D'you remember a Dutch boy that was workin' at th' Snake River ferry when we crossed there? He was th' one that got killed—Nick Thiebaldt. He came t' Virginia last summer. Th' fellers he was workin' for paid him two hundred dollars fr a

team of mules. They give him th' money, an' Nick started f'r Dempsey's ranch t' git th' mules. Nine 'r ten days later Old Man Potter found him layin' in th' brush, jest off th' road, with a bullet hole over his eye, froze stiff.

Potter brung him back t' town, an' he was buried up on th' bench where plenty of other fellers what had died with their boots on had gone ahead of him. Somehow or other it was different with th' Dutchman, though. Livin' he was jest one of dozens of fellers that worked f'r wages in Junction an' Nevada an' th' other towns; dead he was th' bundle of fatwood that flamed up so quick it lifted th' lids plumb off th' stove. He was buried at sundown, an' that very night a bunch of fellers set off down th' Stinking Water, headin' f'r a wickiup that weren't more'n a quarter mile from where Potter had found th' Dutchman, down below Dempsey's. They got there at daylight, an' they found ten men was sleepin' there. Long John Franck an' Big Mouth George Hilderman, what lived there regular, was inside; th' rest was sleepin' outside in their buff'ler robes an' blankets. Jim Williams—he was captain of the posse, an' I'm tellin' you, ma'am, he's a feller that makes 'em *come!*—he hollers t' those fellers t' stay right where they were, an' that th' first one that even lifted his head w'd stop a quart of buckshot 'fore he c'd put it down again. Then he told Long John t' come out with his hands up, an' he an' four other fellers took Long John down t' where th' Dutchman had been layin' f'r nine days an' told him he'd stretch rope if he didn't speak up right now an' tell who'd done th' killin'. It didn't take John long t' make up his mind. Every man there had a coil of rope at his saddlehorn, an' there was plenty of cottonwoods down along th' river. He tells 'em that it was George Ives that done th' shootin' an' that he was one of th' gang back there at th' wickiup. Jim Williams went back an' arrested Ives, an' they brought him in to Nevada City, bringin' Long John an' Hilderman an' a feller named Tex Crowell f'r good measure.

Ives got a fair trial, a sight fairer'n he deserved. I can't savvy why yuh ain't heerd about it, Miss Ann, 'cause Colonel Sanders was th' prosecutor. It's lucky that he was in town an' willin' t' take a hand 'cause th' roughs had hired every lawyer they c'd

find in th' gulch t' defend Ives. Th' trial took three days: Saturday, Sunday, an' Monday. It was after dark on Monday when th' jury of twenty-four men come back an' said that Ives was guilty. Judge Byam hadn't no more than read th' verdict when Sanders jumped up and made a motion that they turn Ives over t' th' sheriff, Bob Hereford, with orders t' hang him jest as soon as a gallows c'd be rigged up. That's jest what happened, too. All th' roughs was hollerin' t' give him time, an' Ives hisself asked Sanders t' give him till mornin' t' settle his affairs an' write letters to his mother an' sisters back in Wisconsin. Right then a feller named Biedler that was one of th' guards sung out t' Sanders t' ask Ives how much time he'd given th' Dutchman—an' that settled th' hash f'r Ives. He was hanged half an hour later.

That's 'bout all I feel free t' tell yuh, Miss Ann. Y' see, th' men of Alder Gulch mean business. They ain't gonna set back an' let th' roughs git th' upper hand again. Ives wasn't alone when Nick Thiebaldt was killed, an' Williams an' Colonel Sanders an'—an' some other fellers—know it. They know that Bob Zachary an' Whisky Bill Graves was with Ives when he held up th' Bannack stage near Rattlesnake, too, an' that it was Dutch John Wagner an' Steve Marshland that tried th' holdup of Milt Moody's pack train last month. They know what everybody has known f'r months, an' they're gonna do somethin' about it. They're bein' jest as law-abidin' as they can in a country where there ain't no law, an' there'll be no innocent men strung up if they c'n help it. With th' others—well, if I was one of 'em I'd shore pick me a place about a thousand miles off an' start for it right now. I wouldn't be p'ticular 'bout th' place, neither, jest as long as it was a thousand miles from th' Three Forks of th' Missouri.

You'd best take a big snort of this here brandy, Miss Ann—there's nobody round but me t' see yuh do it. I wouldn't 've told yuh all that stuff 'bout George Ives if I'd knowed it was goin' t' make yuh look like a ghost. Livin' alone like this ain't good f'r yuh, Miss Ann. When I see Jesse I'm goin' t' tell him he'd best head f'r Bannack soon 's he kin.

Ann Minor: I—I wish you would, Clem. . . . Here, take this bottle of brandy with you. It will be midnight, and after, before you get to Rattlesnake Ranch, and you'll be glad to have it. It's bitter cold. And take Jesse this scarf I knitted for him. If he can't be here for Christmas he might as well have his present. . . . Good-by, Clem, and God bless you. You're the best friend I've got in the world. Good-by . . . good-by. . . . I think he's the only friend I've got. I'm not a fool, Clem. I know what you were trying to tell me. A thousand miles—yes, dear old friend, or five thousand miles. I've got money, and I can cash a draft on Wells-Fargo anywhere. We can go to Europe or Australia. Oh, Clem, you are a good friend. I should have told you of what Rose Bottom told me, about how people are whispering that Henry Plummer is one of the road agents and that he was one of the four men who tried to rob Mr. Hauser ten days ago but were scared off. I didn't think to tell him. I was too worried. I don't care what happens to Plummer or any of them. Jesse's not guilty, he's not. Oh, Jesse . . . Jesse. It's late, and I can cry all I want to. Nobody will hear me. Jesse. . . .

Chapter XVII



JESSE REACHED BANNACK on the heels of the worst storm of the winter. Throughout the first week of January the snow fell so thickly that Ann, from her home, could not see the outline of the Edgerton cabin less than a hundred yards away. The snow still fell, and the wind from the peaks screamed like a banshee's wail about the eaves when she went to bed on the night of Friday, the eighth. Hours later, she was roused by an insistent tapping on her bedroom window. She thrust her arms into the sleeves of her wool bath wrapper, knotted the cord about her waist, and lit a candle. Jesse stumbled across the step as she opened the door. She saw that the snow had ceased and that the winter stars blazed in the wind-scoured sky. Jesse staggered as

he crossed the room and dropped wearily into a chair. He tugged at the scarf which was knotted about his mouth and nostrils, and she saw that his face was ashen and that deep lines she had never before seen were etched about his eyes. His breath had frozen in the scarf, and it crackled as the folds straightened.

"I'll be all right in a minute," he gasped. "Cold—that's all."

"Don't try to talk, Jesse." She set a tumbler and the brandy bottle on the table. He fumbled to remove his bearskin mittens, and she poured the glass half full and held it to his lips. He drank the liquor as though it were water and gestured for more.

"Don't worry, I'll never feel it. By the time it's cut through the ice that's caked inside of me, there won't be enough of it left to make a baby drunk. God in His glory, I'm frozen to the marrow."

He was sick from cold and the ordeal of long hours in the saddle, too sick to protest when she knelt at his feet and pulled off his felt-lined boots and the two pairs of socks he wore beneath them. The socks were dry, and neither his toes nor his fingers—he had removed his mittens and the woolen gloves and was striving to flex his stiffened hands—showed the dead-white pallor of frostbite. She opened damper and drafts on the stove and piled fatwood and kindling on the coals.

"The water's warm in the kettle, Jesse. I can have a tubful hot in just a little while, and you can put your feet in it. That will warm you quicker than anything, and just so you're not frost-bitten it can't hurt you."

"I'd be asleep here in the chair before the chill was off it," he said. He rose and stripped off the bearskin coat, mate to that one which he had sent her, and a long-skirted buckskin shirt which he wore beneath. He stooped and kneaded the flesh of his thighs between his hands. "I'll be stiffer than a ramrod in the morning," he observed. "I think I could manage to stay awake while coffee was boiling, Ann. I'm too dog-tired to eat, but that cognac hits like a rifle bullet on an empty stomach. It's hollerin' for a little company."

She poured a dipper from the pail into the coffeepot and set it over the mounting fire.

"Your horse!" she asked suddenly. "I just happened to think—"

"He's down—for keeps, I'm afraid, in this weather. I'd expected to get a fresh one at Rattlesnake; but the corrals there were empty, so I came on with what I had. He lasted to the top of the first hill, where the road hits Yankee Flat. I got the bridle off him and loosened the cinches so if he does get up he won't have the saddle to bother him. Poor devil, I know how he felt. It's only about a mile from where he dropped to here, but it seemed like ten."

"You might have died, Jesse! You passed right by Goodrich's Hotel, and you should have stopped there—at least until you were warm."

"I happened to prefer coming here," he said curtly. He paused a moment, then continued, choosing his words carefully: "You see, I told certain parties that I would be in Bannack tomorrow—that's today now—and that they could find me at home. I want to be here when they call, that's all."

"Jesse!" she screamed hoarsely. He turned irritably, his brows knitting.

"Now what's wrong?"

"In a minute—the coffee's ready." She fought for control while she filled the cup. *I've got to make him listen to me, and he won't unless I'm calm. He'll listen to reason, but if I'm nervous or—or if I quarrel he'll just get angry.* She waited while he poured the steaming coffee into his saucer, blew on it, and drank.

"You haven't been in Bannack for a long time," she began. "You'll find things different from when you left . . ."

"I guess I'll be able to find my way around without getting lost, Ann. After all, Alder Gulch isn't on another planet."

"It might as well be, I think. You've got to listen to me, Jesse. First, the people here know all about that man Ives being hanged—"

"Why shouldn't they? That was nearly three weeks ago. Great grief, Ann, if you've got anything to say, say it. I'm too tired to enjoy aimless arguing."

"I'm trying to tell you about Bannack and the people here," she said sharply. "People you know well, Jesse, and they're saying—"

"They're saying!" He seemed to snatch the words from her lips. His big hand smacked the table. "They're saying! They're thinking! They're whispering in corners! Good God Almighty, what are they doing?"

"Let's not quarrel, Jesse—please."

"You dealt the hand, but I'll play it," he said furiously, "and I'll play it my way. If the people here in Bannack are really doing anything, I'll listen to you until morning; but it's past three o'clock, and I've ridden sixty miles from Dempsey's, and I prefer sleep to listening to back-fence gossip."

"Would you listen to Judge Edgerton?" she interrupted.

"I would not," he shouted back, "unless I knew damned well he'd done something more than talk. He doesn't dare act. He's a chief justice; but his parish or whatever you call it is Idaho, and this isn't Idaho. I can tell you why Edgerton is staying here instead of going to Lewiston. Captain Mullan, who laid out the road from Walla Walla to Fort Benton, is back in the East. So's Captain Fisk, who was here last summer. They know the country, and the President will listen to them. They're recommending that all this country—everything east of the Bitterroots to Fort Union at the mouth of the Yellowstone—be made a new territory. It will be created this year, probably by summer, and the name of it will be Montana; and the first governor will be the Honorable Sidney Edgerton, who right now isn't saying or doing a thing that might cost him that position. Wouldn't it look pretty if he took a hand in the game that his nephew, Wilbur Sanders, is playing in Bannack? Sanders is the brains of the Vigilance Committee and—"

"What did you say, Jesse? Is there really a Vigilance Committee—like there was in California?"

"Don't the gossipers know that?" He laughed loudly, mockingly, and she realized that he was drunker than he suspected. Both his talkativeness and his flaring anger sprang from nearly a pint of French brandy which he had drunk neat. Now, as the

room warmed, it was mounting to his brain. "There most certainly is a Vigilance Committee, Ann, and it's in action. Who else, or what else, do you think was responsible for the hanging of the two men who were strung up on the Stinking Water last Monday night?"

"I hadn't heard of that," she said truthfully. "Who were they, Jesse—or don't you want to tell me?"

"It's no secret, Ann—they were left hanging, and each one had a placard on his breast telling who he was and why he was elevated to his present station. That's a good joke! They were elevated, all right, but there was three feet of thin air under their heels! You're supposed to laugh, Ann."

"I can't . . . hanging doesn't seem funny to me. Let's not talk any more, Jesse. You said you wanted to get some sleep."

"Don't you want to know who they were? You don't know 'em, Ann. One was a fellow named Yeager—they called him 'Red'—and the other was a squawman named George Brown. They were guilty, all right, and they were hanged. That's fact, not over-the-fence gossip—and now I will go to bed. . . . Gosh, I'm stiff. I'm staggering like Bill Fairweather when he comes down the middle of Wallace Street on one of his famous drunks."

2

Sleep, she knew, was impossible for her. She felt as though she would never sleep again. *I've got to wait until morning. Jesse will be sober then, and he'll—just to think of sitting here like this and waiting for Jesse, my husband, to sober up. He was so tired and cold, and he said that the brandy hit him like a rifle bullet. Poor Jesse. I'm sorry for him. I love—no, I don't! He's never done anything to make me love him.*

She tiptoed to the door of his room and listened to his deep breathing, then went to her own room, dressed, and returned to the chair by the stove. She blew out the candle and sat in the dark, rising now and then to lift the stove lid very quietly and drop another billet in the firebox. Dawn did not steal across

the panes until long after seven o'clock, and the tinny voice of the clock had sounded eight before she heard Jesse stirring. Quickly, then, she filled the coffeepot and busied herself with breakfast. When his door opened she saw that he had donned his best black suit and was wearing a white, ruffled shirt with a black string tie. He crossed the room and scraped a peephole in the heavily frosted pane.

"Good morning, Ann. We'll have bright sunshine today, for a change, but it will be colder than the devil's mercy, if I'm any judge of weather. By the way, was I drunk last night?"

"Why, no, Jesse, of course not!" *That's what he wants me to say. He'd hate me if I told him he was what Clem would call likkerized.* She changed the subject quickly.

"Do you know, Jesse, after I went to bed last night"—*that's the second fib I've told in less than a minute!*—"I got to thinking, and I believe I've seen that man Yeager. Wasn't he a rather short man, who wore his hair long and whose hair and beard were even redder than Bill Fairweather's? I think he worked for Mr. Thompson when he first came here."

"That's the fellow. You've seen Brown, too. He was the tough-looking jasper who ran the ferry when we crossed the Snake near Fort Hall. He and his squaw came to Alder Gulch last summer and built a shack on the flats below Junction. Then he moved up to Dempsey's and tended bar there. His wife stayed behind. She washed clothes for a good many of us."

"I feel sorry for her—it's the women who suffer." She placed their breakfast on the table. Jesse ate voraciously.

"Yeah—although I'll risk a bet that Mrs. Brown knew pretty well what he was up to. She's a Sioux woman, I was told, which means she's a long way from her folks."

You're just as calm as a May morning, Jesse—but you would be. When that man in Ogden City was all ready to shoot you, you played with him like a cat with a mouse.

"More coffee, please, Ann. Why is it that coffee cooked in a house is always better than any you can get in a restaurant?"

"Is it? I don't eat many restaurant meals. I wish I could get

those men out of my mind, Jesse. I imagine they were guilty enough, but it seems horrible—their being hanged like that.” *Why did I say that?*

“Maybe so.” He stirred his coffee for a moment. “They had only themselves to thank, though. The boys from Alder Gulch were after a fellow named Aleck Carter—he was with Ives when the Dutchman was killed. They chased him clear to Deer Lodge, only to find out that Brown had sent Yeager over the mountains ahead of them with a warning for Carter and the rest of them to make themselves scarce. So on their way back they collected Yeager and Brown, tried ‘em, and hanged ‘em to a cottonwood tree on Laurin’s ranch.”

“Who are ‘they,’ Jesse?” He stared at her for a moment.

“I can’t—no, by God, I *won’t* answer that question, Ann. You should have had more sense than to ask it.”

“I’m sorry”—*He’s right. I should have had more sense than to ask him that. Now he’s angry again*—“I really didn’t mean to be curious, but Clem mentioned several names. A man named Williams, for one. Another name was Biedler.”

“Jim Williams commanded the guard during the trial of George Ives,” he said slowly. “Biedler—everybody calls him ‘X,’ which is his middle initial—was one of the guards. I don’t want to talk about it any more, Ann.”

He pushed back his chair and went again to the window.

“There’s a four-foot drift across the path. I’ll break through it for you—and if you go uptown you’d better wear all the clothes you can find. I’ll bet it’s thirty below. Say, did I have sense enough to put my boots where they’d dry?”

“I put them behind the sto— Jesse! You’re not going out!” *You mustn’t! I’ve got to tell you what people are saying about Plummer and everyone who seems to be a friend of his. Oh, Jesse, if we were only friends.*

“I’ve got to.” He kicked off the moccasins he was wearing and, sitting down, folded his trousers carefully and pulled over them two pairs of woolen socks, then stamped his feet into his felt-lined boots. He lifted his bearskin coat from the peg.

"We've talked too much, Ann. Right now is a bad time for talking too much. Red Yeager talked before they strung him up. Do you understand?"

"No." She looked at him, wide-eyed.

"He talked," Jesse repeated. "He told the name of every road agent in the country, and the Vigilance Committee has that list. Now can you guess why talking too much would be bad business?"

She nodded. Her throat was as dry as old paper, and she did not trust herself to speak. She wanted to shriek at him, shriek that his name was linked with that of Plummer in Bannack gossip, but she could not break through the barrier of cold reserve which he had raised between them. Jesse tucked the ends of his scarf inside his collar and drew on his mittens. His thumb touched the latch.

"Maybe you'd better know one thing—Clem Talbot is riding with the Vigilantes!"

The door closed behind him. She watched him as he shoveled a path through the drift and then set out toward Main Street. She washed the breakfast dishes and hung dishrag and towels on the rack. The room was comfortable so long as one remained close to the stove.

Three men hanged by the Vigilantes. Vigilantes! There was something in the very sound of the word that was a menace to all evildoers. Not Jesse, though. He couldn't have killed and robbed or, disguised, have been implicated in those stage hold-ups. But could he prove his innocence? Brown and Yeager had been tried, sentenced, and hanged within a few hours, and the evidence against them—she tried to remember what Jesse had told her—was apparently only the word of someone in Deer Lodge who had said the two had conspired to warn the outlaws there.

The clock on the wall struck ten, and she counted the strokes. She could call a name for every one of them, the name of a man known by everyone in Bannack to be active in the lawless group. Ned Ray, Buck Stinson, Gallagher, Carter, Steve Marshland and

Dutch John, Graves, Zachary, Cyrus Skinner, Bunton—there were ten names already, and she'd rattled them off without a pause. And she hadn't mentioned Henry Plummer, with whom her husband was as friendly as though they had been brothers. And Jesse was doing nothing about it, nothing.

She hurried to her room and selected clothing to wear out of doors on such a day. Woolen drawers and two pairs of woolen stockings that reached to midhigh. Two flannel petticoats and, over all, the gray wool dress. It was well worn now, but in Hannack clothes were worn to the point of disintegration. With the bearskin coat she'd be warm no matter how cold the weather. She closed the damper and banked the fire lightly, then followed to the road the path which Jesse had cleared. A woodsied had gone by—she recalled hearing the bells while she and Jesse sat at breakfast—and the four horses had trampled two parallel paths through the drifts. She saw no one until she reached Main street and then only one man, swathed like a mummy, who was trudging along the opposite side and who turned into the saloon which had been Cyrus Skinner's. She hurried to Thompson's store.

"I was looking for my husband, Mr. Thompson. Have you seen him?"

"No, Mrs. Minor. He may be in Percy and Hacker's—let me send Joseph to look for him."

Young Swift slowly donned his blanket coat and a shabby fur cap. She forced herself to chat of the weather while she waited. Yes, this was the coldest weather they'd had yet, and spring was still a long way off. *Man, haven't you heard of what the Vigilantes have done and are doing?* Yes, if we have much more snow the roads might become thoroughly blocked, and food might be at a premium. *You break bread with Harry Plummer every day; don't you know what people have been saying about him ever since last November?* She was glad when Thompson excused himself and retired to the high desk on which he kept his books; then she wished he would return and talk to her. Why didn't Jesse come? There was so little time. It would be dark by four and if they were going to do anything. . . .

She did not hear his footfalls, or Swift's, on the snow-covered boards outside.

"Is anything wrong, Ann?"

"Why, no." She thanked Swift and waited until he had joined Thompson at the rear of the store. "I've got to ask you something, Jesse—what are you going to do?"

"What on earth is there to do while this cold lasts? I will probably continue the game of cribbage I was playing with Granville Stuart when you sent for me. I'm afraid he has me licked, too."

"Jesse, I'm serious. I don't know why you came to Bannack at this time, when everything's so upset, but if it was because of me and if you're staying here because of me—listen to me, Jesse!—I want to tell you that I'll go away with you, right now. I can ride, and I'm not afraid of cold."

Fire leaped in his eyes. She saw it, saw the impulsive movement of his hands toward her; and then those hands dropped, and the fire was quenched by the mocking, half-cynical expression she had come to know so well.

"I must have scared you, Ann, when I told you the details of the necktie party at Laurin's. Go home and quit thinking about it."

"But, Jesse, you've got to know—"

"Not necessarily. I—" The door behind him opened, and he stepped aside as Mrs. Bottom entered the store. Jesse continued hotly: "I'm not afraid of anybody in Bannack, and I'm not running. No bunch of Strangers can prove anything on me, so run on home and forget the whole business."

He touched the brim of his fur cap as he passed Mrs. Bottom, who stood, open-mouthed, and stared at them. Ann heard the door close and watched the indistinct bulk of his tall figure pass the frosted window. She knew that Rose was watching her and that Francis Thompson and Joseph Swift were watching too. They, and all others in Bannack, had heard by now that the Vigilantes were riding and that two men had been hanged. The rumors were crystallizing now. Men and women would speak boldly of matters which before Christmas had been whispered

only with the utmost caution. They knew. Everyone in Bannack knew except Jesse Minor, and he might have known if he and his wife were not divided by—by what? By a naked sword forged of pride and obstinacy. She turned and faced Thompson and Mrs. Bottom. She would say something and show them that her head was high and that she too was unafraid. Her lips parted, and at that moment Joseph's voice broke the silence.

"Look!" he shouted. "There's something . . ."

His face was pressed against the window. Ann was nearest the door and was first to reach the sidewalk. Three men had drawn rein in the trampled snow of Main Street. All were muffled to the eyes in heavy wrappings, their horses were rimed with the frost of their own breath; but Ann recognized the leading figure as that of John Wagner—Dutch John. She could not identify the others. They rode behind Wagner, and one balanced a double-barreled shotgun on the horn of his saddle.

"Where's the sheriff?" he shouted.

A man's voice shouted a reply, and Ann realized suddenly that half the men of Bannack were standing on the sidewalk or wading through the snow toward the riders. She saw Henry Plummer push his way through the crowd.

"What's wrong here?" he asked crisply.

"I'm John Fetherstun. That's Neil Howie, and we've got Dutch John. He was trying to skip the country when Neil caught him south of Dry Creek Ranch. I'm helpin' bring him in."

"What's the charge? There's been no warrant issued for him that I know of." A ripple of laughter rose from the men. Fetherstun pulled the scarf from over his nose and mouth before he answered.

"Armed robbery on the road," he said, and another voice added: "He and Steve Marshland held up Moody's train last month, Plummer. Maybe you've heard of it." The speaker was Wilbur Sanders. "I'll take the responsibility for any charges against Wagner," he added. Only two words of Plummer's reply reached Ann's ears. They were ". . . habeas corpus. . . ." The rest was smothered by Wagner's guttural, sharply accented

tones. The prisoner had dropped the reins on his mule's neck. He held his mittened hands toward Sanders.

"Mein hands hurt bad," he said. "I was frostbit."

"We'll take care of them, John. One of you fellows call Dr. Glick, will you? Can you get down off that mule, John?"

Wagner dismounted clumsily. *He looks like a big stupid ox*, Ann thought—and then she saw Henry Plummer edge out of the group. Ned Ray and Jesse were standing on the sidewalk in front of Hacker's saloon, and the three of them moved off, talking earnestly, in the direction of Yankee Flat. Then Smith Ball appeared from somewhere and took Wagner's arm. Fetherstun was on the other side of Wagner, and behind them were Sanders and Neil Howie. Howie was walking stiffly, his feet wide-spread, as a man will after a long ride. Then the street was emptied as suddenly as it had filled. The idle miners retreated to the warm shelter of the saloons, and the storekeepers returned to their shops. Ann was conscious again of the biting cold. Her body, protected by the bearskin, was comfortable, but her legs were numb to mid thigh. Even flannel petticoats and heavy underwear could not keep one warm in such weather. She trudged through the drifts to her own home and heaped wood on the fire.

Jesse did not return until suppertime. Twice, while they were eating, he rose and pressed his face to the small window beside the door. Once she heard the snow-muffled thudding of hooves and the jingle of bridle chains, but the riders did not draw rein. She sipped her coffee and tried to be casual.

"What will be done with Dutch John, Jesse?"

"I don't know. He was questioned this afternoon."

"By Mr. Plummer?"

"No. You've got a lot of curiosity, haven't you, Ann? Are all the women of Bannack like you?"

"Mrs. Bottom said—"

"Rosie Bottom is a fool. If you've got to know, Wagner was held in Sears's hotel this afternoon and then was taken to a cabin at the edge of the Flat where he's being held under guard."

"Are they going to hang him?" she persisted.

"I wasn't informed." He rolled and lit a cigarette, then—to Ann's amazement—crushed the cigarette in his saucer and sat with the match held carefully between his fingers.

"Jesse!" He looked up quickly. "I told you this morning, and I'll say it again. We could go away. I'm not afraid of cold. We could start now and be twenty or thirty miles away by daylight."

"You're . . ." He did not continue. Someone rapped sharply at the door, and the bitter air swept into the room when Jesse raised the latch and spoke through the crack. Ann could not hear what the caller said.

"I'll be with you right away," Jesse replied. "Come in where it's warm while I put my coat on."

A voice said, "No," and Jesse closed the door. She did not speak while he pulled on his boots and shoved his arms into the sleeves of the bearskin coat. He stepped closer to the lamp and examined the percussion caps on the two short Colts before dropping one into each side pocket.

"Don't get excited, Ann," he said harshly, "and if any of the women drop in—which isn't likely in this weather—don't sit around gossiping and making guesses. Nothing will happen tonight, I'll give you my word on that."

"You're coming home?"

"Certainly—but I don't know when."

"I'll wait up for you."

If he replied, the words were muffled in the scarf which he was wrapping about his face. He drew on his mittens and left the house. She ran to the window and saw him turn to the left, toward Main Street. The messenger who had come for him had not waited.

She washed the supper dishes and stacked them on the shelves, then stood for a long time at the window. No one passed the house. She could see the lights of the Edgerton cabin and, beyond them, other lights which must be at Vails'. *I'll be calm. I've got to be calm. Jesse gave me his word that nothing would happen tonight, and I'll believe him. I'll go crazy if I try to wait up for Jesse, though.*

The gray of the late winter dawn was on the walls of her room when she awoke. To her amazement, she had slept the night through. Jesse's coat hung from the peg in the corner, and a square of paper was pinned on his door. "I was up most of the night. Let me sleep, but if anybody comes for me wake me right away."

She prepared her breakfast quietly and set the coffeepot on the back of the stove, then scraped the frost from the window which faced the road. The day was one of brilliant sunshine. The wind had died, and the smoke from other breakfast fires rose in straight gray columns. Jesse slept until after ten, then came from his room and ate the fried mush and drank the coffee she put before him. He rolled a cigarette and turned his chair so that it faced the window.

"Is Dutch John—" she began.

"He's still alive and in custody. I believe he was questioned last night."

"By whom, Jesse?"

"Oh, some of the men. It looks as though Bannack might get a Vigilance Committee, now that Virginia's set the style."

"Do you want to see one?"

He did not reply directly.

"It's been overdue for a long time. There 're plenty of men around here who have done enough to merit hanging a dozen times over."

"Yes. Men like Buck Stinson and—"

Jesse turned on her quickly.

"No names, Ann; not even here in the house. That's what all the arguing was about last night. There's got to be something more than town gossip and suspicion before a man's made to stretch a rope—as they found out after arguing more than half the night."

"Who was there, Jesse?"

"Oh"—he shrugged—"some of our more virtuous fellow-citizens, plus a few from Virginia. At least, that's what I was told."

"Don't you know? Weren't you there?"

"No to both those questions. I spent most of the long night in Hacker's, playing a modest game of poker with Henry Plummer and a couple of other fellows. Buck Stinson sat in for a while." He spoke casually, nor seemed to notice her involuntary gasp.

"Jesse! You couldn't have been so foolish!"

"Why not? Are Judge Edgerton and young Sanders going to tell me how I shall pass my evenings?"

"But at a time like this, Jesse! You must know what people are saying about Henry Plummer—and everyone in the country knows about Buck Stinson." *There! I've said it—Henry Plummer!*

"Have you ever seen either of them hold up a stage, Ann?"

"Of course not, but—"

"Edgerton and Sanders would both tell you that your testimony was worthless. That's what the law-and-order crowd has been up against—a thousand words of gossip for one of real fact."

She wanted to reply, to scream to him that young Tilden had identified Plummer as one of the men who had held him up on Horse Prairie, but she bit her lips on the words.

"Jesse, I'm afraid," she said simply.

"Of what? Just stay in the house and mind your own business. There's nothing to be afraid of."

She wanted to tell him that she was afraid of their neighbors, afraid of what the idle miners and freighters and other workers might do if someone rose from their ranks to lead them. Rose Bottom had told her how the Vigilante activity in California had expended its energy in scores of floggings and banishings in which many innocent people had suffered. A storekeeper in Grass Valley had been given fifty lashes and driven from the settlement on evidence no more definite than the statement of a miner who claimed that a full ounce of gold registered several pennyweights short on the man's scales. And at Downieville, in '51, a young Spanish woman had been hanged because she had stabbed a drunken miner while defending her own honor—the phrase was Mrs. Bottom's. And Jesse himself had

told her about the Helm brothers, who robbed men and then accused their own victims of robbery and led the mob which hanged them. Such things could happen here in the Beaverhead country unless there were men strong enough to control the mobs. She tried to marshal those thoughts into some form to which Jesse would listen. He did not notice her long silence.

"Will Judge Edgerton be in charge of any committee that's organized here?" she asked at last. A mob might respect and obey a man like Sidney Edgerton.

"Your memory's rather short, Ann. I told you the other night why Judge Edgerton, for his own sake, has got to keep out of such matters."

"Mr. Sanders, then?"

"I told you something else—that this was no time to ask questions or make guesses."

He drummed irritably on the table, then rose and went to the door. He had seen someone coming up the path from the road, and his hand was on the latch when the visitor knocked. Again Jesse spoke in low tones through an inch-wide opening of the door. He did not even suggest that the man come in. Ann peered shamelessly through the window but could not recognize the messenger. He was bundled to the eyes in a gray scarf, and his feet and legs were wrapped in many layers of torn gunnysacks—"Mormon moccasins," the miners called such footwear. He limped slightly as he retraced his steps along the path.

"Was that Ned Ray, Jesse?"

He had already stamped his feet into his boots.

"Quit it, Ann. For God's own sweet sake, won't you and all the women of this town try for just one day to mind your own business? I'm going out—you can expect me back when you see me."

He slammed the door behind him. The limping man had waited for him and fell in beside him. She waited until the two figures, black against the snow, were out of sight, then wrapped a shawl about her head and shoulders and ran to the next cabin. Mrs. Edgerton saw her coming and opened the door. The judge rose from a chair by the fireplace and bowed.

"I came to see you, Judge Edgerton. I must talk to you."

"Certainly." He was gravely courteous. "Mary, I think Mrs. Minor might like a cup of coffee."

"No, thank you. I've had my breakfast." Ann looked helplessly about the room. Mrs. Sanders was there, and thirteen-year-old Martha Edgerton, and young Henry Tilden. The women's faces were grave, and Mrs. Sanders looked as though she had been crying. Ann hesitated. To speak her thoughts before so many would not be easy. The child Martha seemed aware of her silence and the hostile atmosphere and bravely made conversation.

"Dutch John Wagner is in jail down on the Flat," she volunteered. "They're gonna hang him up by his neck."

"Martha!" her parents exclaimed. Ann checked any additional rebuke.

"That's all right," she said. "That was what I wanted to speak to you about."

"About Wagner, Mrs. Minor?"

"Not exactly. Is it true, Mr. Edgerton, that a Vigilance Committee has been formed in Bannack?"

"Officially I know of no such organization, Mrs. Minor," he said cautiously.

"Of course not—but unofficially you must know something."

He shook his head, frowning sternly at his daughter.

"It's common knowledge that Dutch John Wagner has been arrested," he said slowly. "He may be tried for complicity in the holdup of Moody's train last month, and, if found guilty, he may be executed. But—kindly let me finish, Mrs. Minor—none of the matters which now engage the men of Bannack is any business for women's meddling. I was not here last June, but what I have learned has convinced me that three men, each a bloody-handed murderer, went scot-free after killing young Dillingham in Alder Gulch, just because the sentimental women of Nevada City interfered with justice. Nothing of that sort will be permitted to happen here."

He knows everything, Ann thought bitterly, but he's hiding behind his position as district judge. That was why he was staying here in the house, so that he could remain officially ig-

norant of all that occurred. Fear had driven her to him; now she felt herself growing angry.

"Those women made a terrible mistake," she agreed, "but Vigilance Committees and mobs have made mistakes too. I'm afraid for my husband."

She saw the two women exchange glances. Young Tilden's lips parted, then closed again. Edgerton said only, "Yes?" with the merest hint of query.

"I've heard the gossip," she went on hurriedly. "I know that Henry here identified Sheriff Plummer as one of the men who held him up. I know what everyone in Bannack knows—that Plummer and Stinson and Ned Ray and Jack Gallagher are all of them road agents, just as guilty as Dutch John Wagner or Steve Marshland."

"I've lived in Bannack for several months, Mrs. Minor," Edgerton said quietly. "I've heard the same gossip and accusations that you have."

She would gain nothing from this visit. He was coldly disinterested in anything she might say, and Mrs. Edgerton and Mrs. Sanders mirrored his disapproval of her call. The child Martha sat on one of the high stools beside the table, her feet swinging, her eyes darting from one to another of her elders. Her small face was a study in intense self-satisfaction. *I can talk, but I won't. I can tell you everything you want to know, but I won't. None of us likes you or trusts you—or your husband either.* Ann faced Edgerton, striving to be as calm as he.

"There's been too much gossip and rumor—"

"I quite agree with you, Mrs. Minor."

"—And it hasn't all been true. I don't care what people say, but my husband has never ridden with any of those road agents—never! The Vigilance Committee ought to know that. There are plenty of men in Bannack and in Alder Gulch who have been as friendly with Henry Plummer as Jesse has!"

"I'll remember what you have told me, Mrs. Minor," said Edgerton coldly. "Now I think it would be better if you returned to your home. I don't wish to appear inhospitable, but . . ."

Ann, herself sick at heart, felt a sudden pity for the man. He

was alone, too; utterly alone. He was a sworn representative of orderly legal procedure in a region where there were neither courts nor laws and where justice was determined by the shouted verdict of men who could be led as easily as they could be driven. Sidney Edgerton could not approve judicially of the trial and hanging of George Ives and those other men, nor could he morally disapprove. Mrs. Sanders stood by the door, ready to open it and close it quickly behind the unwelcome visitor. Edgerton rose and bowed; his wife smiled wanly.

"There'll be no choir practice or ladies' Bible class tonight," Mrs. Sanders said as Ann passed. "We thought it best to—to not have it."

"Yes, I understand. Good-by, Mrs. Sanders."

The cold nipped at her like a live thing as she ran the short distance to her own cabin. There the significance of Mrs. Sanders's words dawned on her. No Bible class—the first Sunday in months that the churchless women of Bannack had not met in their weekly substitute for organized religious services. That cancellation meant that the Vigilance Committee had been organized and that tonight, Sunday, would probably witness the execution of Dutch John Wagner. She remembered him as he had worked on this house which now sheltered her; how he had lifted with apparent ease logs at which two of the other men strained. He was an ox, with an ox's strength and slow mentality, and he would pay with his life for his stupidity while his companion in the crime went free. His death would satisfy the new Committee and the miners of Grasshopper Gulch; they'd probably call a meeting which would depose Henry Plummer as sheriff and—possibly—order him to leave the country.

3

Jesse did not return, and she felt her fears stirring once more. Alone, she did not prepare a hot meal. She cut a few slices of venison from the cold roast and made a sandwich, then sewed until the early twilight fell. Throughout the afternoon she saw no one pass the house nor heard, even at a distance, the sound of

voices. The silence was ominous. Subzero temperatures alone were not sufficient to keep people so closely to their homes. The Sunday after Christmas had been as cold; but neighbor had visited neighbor, and children had sledded on the hill north of Caven's house. In the evening the women had gathered for prayers and singing. Today everyone knew that something terrible was in preparation; they stayed at home and refused the children permission to play, however briefly, out of doors.

She lit the lamp and resumed her sewing. Jesse's socks and her stockings were badly worn. Heavy boots were responsible. One had to wear them in the deep snow, but they wore great holes in the heels of stockings. If only she could get some tightly spun wool and knit—she leaped to her feet as the door was flung open. Rose Bottom ran across the room.

"Ann! Oh, Ann dear, have you heard what's goin' on?" Her fingers clawed at Ann's arm and shoulder. She babbled hysterically. "It's the Vigilanters—the Stranglers! They're out to-night."

"I expected it. Get hold of yourself, Rose. They're going to hang poor stupid John Wagner, I'm afraid."

"Him? No, they ain't; they ain't even thinkin' about Dutch John. It's—oh, my God, Ann!"

"Sit down, Rose. What is it? Tell me."

The woman paced the room, wringing her hands and weeping.

"My old man—Abe. 'What're you up to?' I says to him. 'I'm sick of this runnin' round at all hours,' I says, 'and I want to know—' and with that he gave me a smack that sent me half-way across the room, and he told me to keep my mouth shut and my nose out of what wasn't my business. I grabbed my cape, and I told him I was going with him if he didn't tell me right out what they was up to. He knew I'd have done it, too, and he told me. They're hangin' Ray an' Stinson tonight, and Henry Plummer, too, if he ain't left town, and your husband—"

"No!" Ann screamed. "You don't know what you're talking about. They're not hanging Jesse."

"He was with Plummer and some of them others all day yesterday, and the Vigilanters know it. Oh, my God, Ann, there's no tellin' what—"

"Go home!" Rose stumbled as the younger, stronger woman jerked her toward the door. "Go home this minute and stay there!"

Ann pushed the wailing creature out of the house and watched her stagger down the path and turn toward her own cabin. The bitter night air cut into her lungs like a knife, but she breathed deeply, again and again. Lights burned in the Vail cabin, only a few hundred yards away. She could see no sign of activity around it, no dark figures against the white snow or moving between her eyes and the lighted windows.

"Jesse," she said aloud, then—her decision reached—ran back to her own room, tugging at her skirts as she ran. Terror such as Rose had displayed could not be simulated. Every word babbled by the woman was an arrow pointing the path. The men of Bannack had risen, and their wrath would be terrible. "They won't hang Jesse. They won't hang Jesse. They won't hang Jesse." She repeated the words like a litany as she stripped off her skirts and pulled on a pair of Jesse's trousers. They were much too large for her; but a belt would hold them at the waist, and the excess length would be concealed by her knee-length felt-lined boots. She divided her hair into two braids and wound them tightly about her head. The bulky fur hat would hide her hair, and the big bearskin coat would effectually conceal her figure. *I'm glad I'm tall. There are plenty of men in Bannack shorter than I am, and this coat makes me look even taller.* Wool gloves on her hands and fur mittens over the gloves. A muffler twice about her throat and its folds pulled over her face to the eyes. Thus dressed, and masked, she could go anywhere without her sex's being suspected. She belted Jesse's big revolver outside the coat. *If they arrest him they'll take his short guns—oh, Jesse, why wouldn't you listen to me?—but I can give this one to him, and he can get away.* She turned out the lamp and hurried into the night.

The Vail cabin first. It was the nearest of any place where Jesse might be. She turned away from the path to the front door and approached from the north end beside the ell, in which was the one bedroom. The ice-coated twigs of a fire bush clutched at the fur coat. She squeezed between the bush and the log wall and approached the window.

Jesse, if there, was not within the range of her vision. Mrs. Vail sat in a shabby rocker close to the stove. She was sewing, and Francis Thompson, in another chair, was chatting casually with her. Henry Plummer, in his shirtsleeves, was stretched out on a couch against the further wall and seemed to be fast asleep. Mr. Vail was not in the room so far as she could see, but Thompson's clerk, Joe Swift, moved into view and perched on the end of the table, one long leg swinging. The peaceful scene might be duplicated in any of the homes of Bannack on any evening, and she wondered for a moment if Rose Bottom's alarm had not been exaggerated. Plummer was still sheriff of the Beaverhead District; it seemed odd that he should be asleep in his home if John Wagner was to be hanged.

She turned to leave, then crouched closer to the dark, rough logs. A compact group of men was walking swiftly up the road. The group halted outside the Vail cabin, and four men detached themselves and waded through the snow to positions where they would command the rear and both sides. All carried weapons, rifles or double-barreled shotguns. Ann drew herself cautiously erect as the others approached the house. In the deep shadow her dark figure was virtually invisible. She could hear what was said, and, more important, she could see. The leader of the group rapped on the door, and Mrs. Vail rose.

"I wonder who that can be?" she said. "Maybe we'll have song-service after all."

Thompson, standing by his chair, shook his head. His face was grave. Plummer stirred and raised himself on one elbow as Mrs. Vail opened the door.

"G'd evening, ma'am." The leader of the group pushed past Mrs. Vail. His companions were on his heels when he halted at

the foot of the couch. Plummer sat up and lowered his feet to the floor. "We want you to come with us, Plummer," the man said.

"Certainly." There was no trace of excitement in the sheriff's level tones. "I'll be with you as soon as I get my coat, Lott."

"I'll get it for you," said John Lott. He stepped to the head of the couch, not taking his eyes from Plummer's face, and lifted a coat which lay on a chair. Beneath the garment, on the seat of the chair, was a wide leather belt and a holstered revolver. Lott held the coat, and Plummer put his arms in the sleeves. Another man brought his overcoat and hat.

"I'm wanted downtown," Plummer said quietly to his sister-in-law. "This business of Dutch John Wagner. . . ."

Lott motioned toward the door, and, as the sheriff passed through, others of the group ranged themselves on either side of him. The only weapons in sight were those carried by the pickets, who ran to overtake the little posse. Ann did not move. She saw Joe Swift hurry across the room and seize Plummer's gun. Thompson gripped his wrist.

"No, Joseph."

"What are they doing—taking him away like that?" the boy demanded. "I'm going to take him his gun."

"No," Thompson repeated. "He—there'll be no need of it."

Swift drew back a pace, his lips twitching, but it was Mrs. Vail who spoke.

"You mean . . ." she began.

"It's a very bad business, Mrs. Vail," Thompson said gravely. "Your husband should be here with you. I'll try to find him. You stay with her, Joe."

"I won't," the boy shouted. He seized his hat and overcoat and hurried from the house. Ann, running, overtook him at the gate. He wheeled at the sound of her voice. His face was ghastly, contorted. She touched his arm.

"Where's Jesse Minor?" she demanded.

"I don't know and care less," Swift exclaimed and pulled away from her lightly restraining hand. She followed more slowly, not wishing to overtake the group which had captured

Plummer. The posse halted at a cabin, and she advanced close enough to see and hear what took place. A light flickered, then blazed steadily as an unseen hand adjusted the wick, and she saw Wilbur Sanders standing at Plummer's side.

"My God, Sanders," the sheriff said. "This—this is terrible. Can't you do something for me?"

"Nothing." The word carried like a bell's tone on the frosty air. "I've got to tell you that you're to be hanged—tonight. Nobody could feel harder about it than I do, but I couldn't help matters even if I was willing to. You're—"

A shriek which burst from Plummer's lips interrupted him. The sheriff flung himself on his knees in the snow; his hands clutched at Sanders's boots.

"Don't hang me, men," he screamed. "You can't do a thing like that. Banish me—chain me up—cut off my hands if you want to, but don't hang me. Oh, please don't hang me. Don't—for Christ's sake, men! I know you all. You've been friends and neighbors of mine. You can't mean to do anything like that to me. For Christ's sake, men, tell me you don't mean it. Wilbur—Charley—oh-h-h-h!"

He groveled at their feet, now whimpering, now screaming. The news that the Vigilantes had begun their work had spread, and men who were not members of the posse had left their cabins and were standing at a respectful distance from Plummer and his captors. A man standing at Ann's elbow spat disgustedly.

"Lissen to him—the goddam thievin' cur. One satisfaction, he won't be squawkin' long."

She tried to nod casually.

"Where's Jesse Minor, d'you know?" she asked through the scarf which covered her face.

"I ain't seen him. Y' might take a look round the Flat."

She hurried away. The Flat—Yankee Flat—was only a name to Ann and the other respectable women of Bannack, a name that was a synonym for male infidelities and depravities. Ann and her kind knew nothing of the section or its geography. She could see lights burning in the saloons on the south side of Main

Street, but she turned into the alley beside Peabody's and stumbled through the darkness to the gate of the T-M corral. The place was deserted. The men who were supposed to remain there to guard against theft or fire had been drawn from their post by the excitement which was sweeping the town. Possibly they had gone no further than the nearest saloon, for the door of the room where they slept was unlatched and a lighted oil lantern hung above the table. She took the lantern and by its light saddled her black mare and a powerful buckskin gelding which Clem had brought from Utah. That done, she returned the lantern to its place and hurried back to Main Street.

Percy & Hacker's—she had never before seen the interior of a saloon—was deserted. Empty chairs stood primly around the tables down one side of the room, and the only man in the place was a red-faced individual who stood behind the long bar and who moved forward quickly as she came through the doorway. For a moment she thought another man was facing her at the far end of the room, then recognized her own reflection in a mirror there.

"Can't serve you, partner," the bartender said. "C'mittee's orders 're for no liquor t' be sold tonight."

"I'm looking for Jesse Minor," said Ann hoarsely.

"I ain't seen him all day."

She left the place. Again, she thought, casual inspection had accepted her as a man, nor had her voice betrayed her sex. She hurried to the corner and turned south. Here, south of Main Street and eastward to the steep descent to the gulch, was the notoriously evil Flat; but its streets were deserted, and the saloons and cabins were unlighted. She met no one and had crossed two of the winding alleys before she saw a faint light glowing behind the drawn curtains of a small cabin. She ran up the short path and hammered on the door. A shadow crossed the orange rectangle of the window, and she knocked again.

"Go away!" A woman's voice shouted through the door. "I can't let you in tonight, and if you've got any sense you'll go home and stay there."

"I'm looking for Jess Minor—"

"He don't hang around the Flat, and you ought to know it. Go look on the hill—over where they hanged Horan. That's where the Stranglers took Buck Stinson."

"They've got Stinson?" Ann never knew why, at such a time, she asked that question.

"Yes. He was at Toland's, and they walked right in and grabbed him—the bastards! Now go 'way, dearie, please, before you make trouble for me."

Ann followed the twisting lane to a wider street. Men had passed here on horseback. The snow was torn by hooves, and her feet scattered a pile of dung, frozen as hard as grapeshot, which rolled across the crust. Within a hundred yards the street angled sharply down the hillside, and she beheld the explanation for the empty saloons and darkened cabins. All the men of Bannack, it seemed, were gathered here in small groups the members of which talked in low tones, one man with another, and eyed suspiciously all who approached them. Farther down the hill a larger knot of men was a black blur against the snow. There—Ann halted and tried to visualize the locale—yes, there were the two stout uprights and the crossbar which had been built at Plummer's orders for the hanging of Horan. She started down the hill, and a man called to her.

"Best stay back, partner. Them Vigilanters got guards all around. Nobody's t' go down there less'n they got business there."

She did not reply. There were no women in the crowd, and she feared that her voice would betray her if she paused to question the stranger. *Jesse, Jesse, Jesse—where are you?* She checked her stride at the sound of loud voices behind her. A man asked, "Who is it?" and another replied, "Ray, the deputy. *V deputy son of a bitch, I call him!*"

Everyone seemed instantly to know what had happened. Ray had been in a gambling house, asleep on a table, and had roused only when the muzzle of a revolver was thrust into his ear. Buck Stinson had been arrested, too.

"Who else?"

"I heard—say, here he comes now!"

Two men gripped Ned Ray by the arms and hustled him along between them. The handsome deputy twisted and struggled in their grasp. He moved his feet only when he was compelled to, and a little wave of snow curled and broke, curled and broke, against his shins. He shouted curses and obscenities which at any other time would have curdled Ann's blood. She had heard oaths in plenty but never words like these—short words spat from between clenched teeth, words which seemed to hang on the still cold air until pushed aside by the next. A woman screamed, and Ann felt her muscles stiffen. There were other women here. Who . . .

The woman's features were indistinguishable. She dodged one man who clutched at her arm and threw herself like a fury on the nearer of the two who held Ned Ray.

"Let him go!" she screeched. "Let him go. He's innocent."

Ray echoed the last word.

"I'm innocent," he shouted. "Innocent! Innocent!"

The man who held him ducked as the woman clawed at his eyes.

"It's Madam Hall," a miner said to anyone within sound of his voice. "Ned's her pimp. Seems like she's a mite riled." He chuckled in his beard. Ray's guard freed one hand and struck at the woman.

"Git her off me!" he bellowed.

The woman dodged the backhand blow and clawed again at the guard's eyes. Another man thrust his foot between her legs and tripped her. She fell on her hands and knees, and as she tried to rise he swung his boot against her rear.

"A couple of you fellers git hold of her," he ordered. "Chase her home and tell her to stay there 'less she wants her neck stretched, too. You, Ed; you and Abe Bottom."

The man he named as Ed, and Abe Bottom, seized Madam Hall's arms. She was weeping now and shrieking between the sobs that her Ned was good to her and that they should not hang him. Ann followed at a little distance as the two dragged her down the slope toward the cabins. They halted at the head of a steep descent.

"This here's far enough," said Ed. "Her shack is right below there, and I don't aim t' miss any of this party f'r no busted-down old whore-lady." He shouldered Bottom aside and, standing behind the woman, pinioned her by the elbows. "You heard what Roe said?" he growled. "You'd best mind it. We mean business, an' you'll shore find yoreself takin' th' stretch out of a rope if'n you come back. Now—git!"

He released her arms and planted his foot against her ample buttocks, then shoved vigorously. Madam Hall ran unwillingly for a few paces and then, gathering speed, journeyed down the hill in an avalanche of her own creating. Ed laughed.

"That'll hold her. C'm on, Abe."

He glanced sharply at Ann as he passed but did not speak to her. She fell in beside Bottom and laid her hand on his arm.

"Abe," she whispered. "I've got to talk to you—it's Ann Minor."

"Ann—my God, Mis' Minor, you ain't got no business out . . ."

"Never mind that. Jesse—where is he!"

"Down"—he pointed toward the gallows—"down thar, I reckon."

"I've got to see him. I've got to. Now!"

"Y' can't, ma'am. It's no place f'r a woman, Mis' Minor, an' f'r you t' go down there w'd only make a bad business that much worse."

"I'm going, Abe. I helped you once, you and Rose, and you've got to help me now. I'm going to walk right beside you, and we'll follow those men who have Ned Ray. If anybody speaks to us, you answer. Do you hear me?"

"I—yes'm, Mis' Minor."

They joined the little group which escorted the deputy. The man named Ed was immediately ahead of them. Halfway down the slope they passed, unchallenged, through a picket line of armed men. A little further, and they stood on level ground at the foot of the gallows where Horan had hung. Ray's guards halted, and Ann saw, only a few paces away, a similar group surrounding Buck Stinson. His arms were lashed to his sides,

and his wrists tied behind him. Like Ray, he was cursing steadily.

"How about that fire?" a voice inquired. "That was all you fellows had to do—"

"We're all ready—we weren't startin' it till you got here."

The kindling had been soaked liberally with oil, and the flames roared swiftly through the billets of pine and aspen which had been stacked above the lighter wood. Within a very few minutes the scene was brightly illuminated: those who stood about the gallows' foot could be identified. A man tossed the noosed end of a rope over the crossbeam, and a low murmur—a catching of the breath upon unuttered words—rose from the crowd. Ann recognized Joseph Swift in the front rank of those about the gallows, and she moved quietly to a position behind him.

"Where's Jesse Minor?" she whispered. The youth did not turn his head.

"I don't know," he gulped. "They're hanging—look yonder, here he comes!"

She wheeled, wishing to see all, yet fearing that which she might see. A third group of men approached, and with them—his arms unbound—was Henry Plummer. A man on either side held him by wrist and elbow. She did not see Jesse and hope surged within her. *Maybe he got away. When the excitement dies down he'll come—but what are they waiting for? Are there others to be brought here?*

"I have the right to a jury trial"—that was Plummer speaking, but his voice was scarcely recognizable, so shrill was it with terror—"I demand that I be given one."

"It won't do you any good to demand, Plummer. Your case has been considered, and you've been sentenced to hang." And that was Wilbur Sanders. His thin features were drawn, his voice low.

"Mr. Lott—John"—Plummer's voice was still more shrill—"I've got to have time. Let me settle my affairs—let me write to my wife! Oh, my poor wife!"

"This is one hell of a time for you to be thinking about her!"

exclaimed John Lott. He left the group about Plummer and walked to the gallows. There he inspected closely the rope and the noose which had been tied at one end of it. Ann's eyes followed every motion as he held the noose in one hand and with the other tested the ease with which the looped rope slipped through the bulky knot formed by nine turns of the bight about the standing part.

"Jesse!" Plummer screamed, and Ann whirled at the sound of that name. "My God, Jess, we've been friends, you and I. Speak to these fellows. Help me!"

Her husband stood at Plummer's right hand, and in all the crowd Ann could see no other face.

"You're past helping, Henry. You've had plenty of chances and plenty of warnings, but you passed them all up. This is the end of the road."

His hand moved in a gesture of finality, and Ann's heart leaped. He was free—unbound! He had not been arrested, and that meant he was one with Lott and Sanders and those others who were seeing justice done. She checked the impulse to rush to his side.

"Frank Thompson will attend to your affairs," Jesse added. Plummer fell to his knees in the snow. Tears were streaming down his cheeks.

"God help me," he babbled. "I'm too wicked to die. God help me."

None heeded him. From the gallows' foot, Lott's command cut sharply through the steady stream of Buck Stinson's curses.

"Bring up Ned Ray!" he ordered.

The deputy was dragged forward. He was bareheaded, and his long hair waved now to one side, now to the other, as he jerked his head to and fro in a futile effort to avoid the noose which was placed about his throat and tightened. Ann did not hear the signal, but several men laid hold of the end of the rope and, hauling hand over hand, jerked Ray into the air.

"That's enough. Hold it."

The hanging man writhed and struggled like a fish on a hook. He pulled first one hand, then the other, free from the knot with

which his wrists had been bound and forced his fingers between the noose and the flesh of his throat. His gasping breaths were horrible. A tall man stepped from among the crowd and, on tiptoe, laid hold of Ray's elbows one after the other and wrenched the man's fingers from under the rope. Ray tried to scream but achieved only a strangled, gurgling bellow. Stinson's oaths ceased.

"There goes poor Ned Ray!" he whimpered. If Lott heard the words he gave no sign. Another rope was thrown across the beam, and Lott's fingers formed the intricate hangman's knot. Stinson's guards were doubling the lashings at his wrists and were binding his arms to his body.

"Bring up Stinson!"

Buck, too, struggled. His hands were tied too tightly for him to duplicate Ray's performance, but he twisted his body as the rope tightened and the knot slipped from under his left ear to beneath his chin. He, too, died slowly.

"Bring up Plummer!"

For a moment none moved. Lott's order must have carried far in the still, cold night, for shouts came from those who stood on the hillside beyond the line of pickets. A third rope now dangled from the beam, and Lott's fingers again passed the harsh strands into the bulky knot. A man standing at Ann's shoulder spoke very softly.

"Henry Plummer! My God, they're hangin' Henry Plummer!"

The words were prayerful. He spoke for the people of Banack and the roaring, wicked towns of Alder Gulch; for prospectors on nameless streams and for the dwellers on the lonely ranches. All knew Henry Plummer; all had heard and repeated the gossip which linked him with the outlaws, but even those who stood about the gallows could scarcely believe that the courteous, soft-spoken sheriff had indeed reached the end of the trail and that he would presently hang beside his deputies, Stinson and Ray, whose bodies were still twitching. Plummer remained on his knees, still begging mercy of the silent, merciless men who surrounded him. Lott repeated the order more loudly.

"Bring up Plummer!"

Jesse laid his hand on the sheriff's shoulder.

"It's time, Henry," he said.

"At least give a man time to pray." Plummer's voice was calm now, and the request was not without dignity. John Lott heard the words.

"You can do your praying up there!" he said grimly, and Jesse Minor stooped and lifted the kneeling man to his feet.

"It's time, Henry," he repeated. "Time to show that you've got some leather in you."

The sheriff took a slow step, then another. His whining ceased. His eyes were open, but they saw none of the men who advanced with him. Their vision was inward as Henry Plummer stared upon his own soul. He stood quietly beneath the gallows, merely shifting his weight from one foot to another as Smith Ball lashed his ankles together. In the front rank of the spectators young Joseph Swift sobbed loudly and uncontrollably. Plummer's expression changed as he recognized the youth. His hands were still unbound, and he loosened the black silk neckerchief from about his throat and handed it to Swift.

"Keep this to remember me by, Joe," he said, and Swift buried his face in the folds of the scarf. Ball lashed Plummer's arms, elbow and wrist, and then passed the cord several times about the condemned man's body. Lott placed the noose and drew it tight. The huge knot was beneath Plummer's left ear. All was done swiftly, grimly, and in a silence broken only by Plummer himself.

"I've got only one request, men," he said clearly. "Give me a good drop."

His request was granted. Three men—Ann knew them all and wondered in that moment if she could ever again look them in the eyes—gripped him at the thighs and raised him to the full extent of their arms while those who held the rope drew in all but a foot of the slack and jammed it with a series of half hitches about the gallows post. Plummer's high-held body was erect and rigid.

"Now!" snapped Lott, and those who held the sheriff jerked

his body sharply toward the ground. The rope tightened, and the fat knot thrust Plummer's head to the right. He hung quite motionless, his neck broken. No one moved, and the only sound was that of young Joseph Swift's stifled sobbing. For the space of a dozen breaths John Lott stared at the three dangling forms, then moved to where Sanders stood and conferred in low tones with the lawyer and Jesse Minor. Both nodded, and Sanders addressed the members of the posse.

"We don't expect there'll be any trouble, men, but we'll wait here for ten or fifteen minutes. When you're dismissed, go to your homes and stay there. Don't hang around the saloons. Remember your oath—and the less said about tonight's business, the better. Howie, will you tell the pickets to pass the word that friends of the dead men can take charge of the bodies after we leave."

"How 'bout Dutch John?" a voice asked loudly. "He's shore guilty, and we might as well make a cleanup while we're about it. There's room for him 'longside of Ned Ray!"

"The Committee will attend to Dutch John's case in due course," said Sanders crisply. He waited a moment, but there were no other questions. "Who was that?" he asked Jesse.

"George Copley—you know him. A good man but maybe a mite overanxious."

"This is no time for overanxiety," said Sanders sternly. "I'll tell Copley so."

He moved away, and Ann edged through the crowd and laid her hand on her husband's arm.

"Jesse." For a moment he did not recognize her. Then his eyes widened as he identified the bearskin coat and hat and his own Colt buckled about her waist.

"Ann," he whispered. "How in God's name did you get here?"

"Take me away, Jesse, take me away. It's all over now, and you can leave." She was perilously close to breaking. Jesse's fingers closed reassuringly on her arm as he raised his voice and spoke to one of the men who stood near.

"If John Lott asks for me, tell him I'm going over to the road

to speak to George Crisman. Then I'm going home. I haven't been there since early this morning, and my wife's probably having a conniption." He snapped a brusque order to Ann. "You come with me, Jake."

They did not speak until they had crossed the gulch road and passed through the line of pickets and the thin fringe of spectators who had watched the triple hanging. The dry snow squeaked beneath their boots.

"Who knows you were down there?" Jesse asked at last.

"No one," she said, then corrected herself quickly. "That's wrong. Abe Bottom knows I was there. He was with the men who were bringing Ned Ray. I walked with him and told him that if anybody spoke to us he was to answer them."

"Maybe he'll have sense enough to keep his mouth shut, but I doubt it. Having women at hangings, Ann, went out of style in Alder Gulch last June. Stinson would have been strung up then if it hadn't been for the women. There'll be no more mistakes of that kind."

He turned into Second Cross Street, but Ann pulled at his sleeve.

"This way, Jesse. It won't take long, but we have to go to the corral."

"And why?"

"The horses—Lil and Clem's buckskin. I saddled them so they'd be all ready when—when I found you."

He stopped stock-still in the snow.

"You—I—" he stammered. Then: "Good God, Ann, that's what you meant yesterday and again this morning when you wanted me to take you away. I thought you were afraid and wanted to get out of town, but you were worrying about me—is that right?"

"Of course, Jesse. You should have been honest with me and told me just what was going to happen."

"None of the women were told, none of them. That was the only way to guard against rumors and gossip which might have gotten to Mrs. Vail and been passed on to Plummer. You and Mrs. Vail have been friends. Could you have met her and

talked to her and not shown in some way that you knew her brother-in-law was going to be hanged?"

"I don't know—but, Jesse, you and Plummer were friends. You were with him all night while the Vigilantes were meeting. I thought that the Vigilantes were going to hang you!"

"You thought that!" He gripped her shoulder and turned her until she faced him. "Look at me, Ann. Tell me—"

"There's nothing else to tell you. I know now how silly I was, but—oh, hold me, Jesse, hold me tight. It's all been so hard, and I've been so lonely!"

He drew her to him while she tore at the scarf which covered her mouth.

"Kiss me, Jesse," she sobbed. "Hold me tight and kiss me as though—as though you loved me!"

Their lips met and clung, and the dam built of misunderstanding and pride and obstinacy was swept away on a flood of ecstasy.

"Home," he whispered at last. "It's not far, Ann."

"The horses—"

"The men will take care of them. Let's go home, you and I."

"Take my hand, and we'll run, Jesse. I—I'm not cold now."

4

Sunlight, reflected from the snow, was incandescent on the walls when she woke. Jesse still slept, and she lay quietly, watching his face and listening to his deep, even breathing. *I'm married to him now, really married. I'm so glad. We've both been foolish, Jesse, terribly foolish and terribly proud. I love you, Jesse. I tried to tell you and show you last night, but I don't think you'll ever know how much I love you. And you love me, I know you do, but I don't think men love like women do; they can't. A woman's love is like a lamp that will never run out of oil because she hasn't anything else in her life that really counts. It just goes on and on like a river. I wonder if I'll ever try to tell you that, Jesse? We've waited so long for love, you and I.*

She dozed and woke and dozed happily once more, then was

brought to full wakefulness by the sound of his voice and the touch of his hand on her shoulder.

"Someone's knocking, Ann. I hate to wake you—"

"I wasn't asleep—not really."

"Listen to him! He's going to wake somebody or know the reason why, isn't he? Throw your wrapper and a quilt around you, will you, Ann, and tell whoever it is that I'm out on Committee business. Just that—Committee business."

He was propped on one elbow, smoking, when she returned and jumped back under the blankets. Her teeth were chattering.

"The fire is dead out, Jesse, and the house is colder than a barn. Even the water in the pail is frozen solid."

"I'll get a fire going. Who was at the door?"

"Abe Bottom. He said you were needed downtown, and he seemed surprised when I said you were out. Would it be about Dutch John Wagner?"

"It could be. Forget it—like I'm doing." Her long hair, unbraided, streamed over the pillows. He twined a strand about his finger, then raised it to his lips. When she blushed, he laughed and kissed her. "Past nine o'clock, I'll bet—we've lain long abed, Lady Ann. Stay where you are and keep warm until I kick up a fire. There's no use in both of us freezing." He reached out a long arm and dragged his heavy underwear from the chair beside the bed.

"It's my fault, Jesse. I left in such a hurry last night that I never even thought of the fire."

"And when we came back, together, neither of us thought of it." He grinned mischievously. "That makes it even—Steven, my dear."

She was combing her hair when she heard the rattle of gunfire from the general direction of Yankee Flat. Later, while they were at breakfast, the windows shook from the blast of a much heavier explosion. Jesse's eyebrows raised.

"If you feel you ought to go, Jesse, please don't stay here just on my account," she said quickly. "I understand—now—and I won't be frightened again."

"I don't feel that I ought to go, and I am going to stay here—on your account. There's still a lot of loose ends to be picked up between you and me. This morning's a good time to start gathering them."

Only that once, and thus obliquely, did he approach any mention of his obstinacy and her pride which had so long divided them. Ann placed the last of the breakfast dishes on the shelf and dried her hands, then stood with him at the window. He touched her shoulder, and she leaned against him, happily.

"There's a fire downtown, Ann. See the smoke?"

"Yes. I wonder—"

"I don't. Let it burn. Speaking of burning, though—" He turned from the window and entered the room which until the previous night had been his. A photograph of Henry Plummer was in his hand when he returned. It had been taken in Placerville, California, according to the photographer's stamp, but on the lower margin, in a small, almost delicate, hand, was written: "Henry Plummer. Menasha P. O., Wisc."

"He gave me that last spring," said Jesse, "and he's always been sorry he did it. Every time he saw me over at Virginia he threw out some hints about getting it back, and he thought up a different excuse for wanting it every time. I think I'd have given it to him if he'd come out flat-footed and said he didn't want anybody to know where he came from. He's gone now—I'll do him the favor of burning it."

He ripped the portrait into quarters and stuffed the torn pieces into the firebox. They flamed briefly. Jesse replaced the lid and brushed the fingers of one hand lightly against those of the other. The gesture was a ritualistic farewell.

"And that's the end of him," said Jesse softly. "Maybe, somewhere, there are men who learned an almighty bitter lesson and played a straight game from then on. Henry didn't, that's all. He had his chances to go straight and didn't take 'em—and he had plenty of warning that the game was played out here, and he wouldn't get out of the country and save his neck."

He returned to his seat by the table, and Ann perched herself on the arm of his chair.

"How long have you known about him, Jesse—I mean about his being one of the road agents?"

"One of them? He was the chief, my dear, the head man. He planned the holdups and sent fellows like Marshland and Dutch John out to do the dirty work. It was one night last fall—late September, I think—and raining pitchforks and barbed wire. Sam Bunton, brother of Bill Bunton who ran the stage station at Rattlesnake, came stumbling into my cabin to get out of the rain. He was half drunk already; but he was soaked to the skin, and I gave him some dry clothes and a couple of snorts of liquor to warm him up. He was all drunk then, and he talked. Started in telling me about the gangs that had operated about Oro Fino a year or two ago and how they'd all come over the mountains now and were due to make a cleanup that would make Joaquin Murietta and the rest of the California bandits look like cheap tinhorns. He named his own brother and Skinner, who used to have the saloon next door to Goodrich's here, and he named Plummer and three of his deputies. I let him talk. What's more, when he showed signs of running down I threw in a word or two and started him off again. He bragged about the organization they had and about how Henry—since he was sheriff—was in a position to find out about any big gold shipments. Henry would tip the roadsters off, and they'd finish the job."

"But couldn't you have done something, Jesse?"

"No. Maybe that sounds funny, but it's the truth. It was dog eat dog in Alder Gulch in those days. Nobody was thinking of a damned thing except his own claim and the money he was making. There wasn't a man there who wouldn't have laughed at me if I'd asked him to take the word of a worthless drunkard like Sam Bunton—and I've got to admit I didn't think of asking them. I wasn't any too sure myself that Bunton wasn't making the whole business up."

"I think I understand." She nodded gravely. "Bannack was like that when we first came here, Jesse. There wasn't anything you could do."

"The miners themselves would have been the first to hang me

if I'd organized a one-man Vigilance Committee and started in on Bunton and the rest of his pals. I was just like 'em—the only hide I was really interested in saving was my own, so I took the best way I could think of for saving it. I sent word to Henry Plummer that I wanted to see him on important business, and when he came over to Virginia I told him the whole story.

"I told him that I wasn't in any hurry to believe Bunton, but if Sam was telling the truth I was going to take care of Number One. If he and Cy Skinner and the rest of them wanted to take chances on stretching a rope, that was none of my business; but if Jesse Minor was held up along the road, Jesse Minor was sure going to take a hand in the game.

"I laid it on thick, Ann, but Henry knew I wasn't bluffing. I reminded him of what he already knew—that I could shoot faster and straighter than any man in the mountains and that I'd let anyone in his gang throw down on me and still kill him before he could pull the trigger. What was more, I said, if I was held up I wouldn't be satisfied with killing the road agents. I'd take it as proof that Sam Bunton was telling the truth, and I'd come straight on to Bannack and kill on sight a gent named Henry Plummer. What went for me went for Clem Talbot, too—if Clem was ever bothered it would mean sudden death for the sheriff of Bannack."

"And what did Mr. Plummer say to all that?"

"Very little, my dear. Did you expect him to confess his evil ways and swear that he'd reform? Not Henry. He laughed at the whole story and said that the way Sam Bunton ran off at the mouth was common knowledge. So we shook hands and parted good friends, and neither of us mentioned the matter again. When he came over to Virginia, I'd buy him a drink or sit in a game with him at Number Ten; and then he'd go his way, and I'd go mine. And we ended up"—Ann heard his teeth click—"on the opposite ends of the same rope!"

She bent her head and kissed him.

"I'm glad you told me, Jesse. If only I'd known all that last night I wouldn't have—"

"What you did last night worked out pretty well, don't you

think?" He captured her hand and held it in both his. "As to telling you—well, at first there was no sense in scaring you with Bunton's wild yarn, and afterward it was too late. The Committee wasn't organized until after George Ives was hanged, and we were all of us sworn to absolute secrecy. What's more, there wasn't any real evidence against Plummer until Red Yeager did his talking—and that was just one week ago tonight. It was the next day before we knew about it in Virginia and could get together and decide what to do. I came here just ahead of John Lott and Sanders and a couple of other fellows who carried a Committee order for the execution of Plummer, Stinson, and Ray. My job was to locate them and keep an eye on them and to take any necessary action if they tried to skip out. Lott and Sanders had the harder job of putting cards on the table with the men of Bannack and finding out what they'd do. They organized—not that it made any real difference, because those three would have been hanged in any event. The men of Alder Gulch mean business. There'll be no quitting until a man can leave a sack of dust on the sidewalk of Wallace Street and find it there a week later."

"There'll be other hangings, then—Dutch John, for one?"

"If John is alive tomorrow morning he'll owe hell twelve hours! He—" Jesse rose suddenly, almost knocking her from the chair arm, as someone pounded heavily on the door. "I'll see who it is this time, Ann, but I'm not going out today. Let Bannack skin its own snakes." He opened the door a crack, then flung it wide. "Come in, gentlemen."

John Lott and Wilbur Sanders entered and bowed to Ann. Lott smiled through his beard as his eyes rested on the mocasins which were on Jesse's feet.

"Staying home and taking it easy, eh, Jesse? Well, you've earned it, even if it did make you miss the excitement this morning."

"I heard shooting," Jesse admitted. "What was it all about?"

"George Copley getting shot, for one thing—killed."

"No!"

"Yes!" Lott smiled grimly. "You said last night that he was

a mite overanxious, and he proved it this morning when he and Smith Ball got a crowd together and paid a call on a Mexican named Pizanthia down on the Flat."

"Pizanthia?" Jesse interrupted. "He's not on the list."

"No. He's not on the list, and neither Sanders nor I were consulted until it was too late. Copley and Ball and a few others had heard the fellow had a bad reputation before coming here, and they took it on themselves to investigate him. When he didn't open the door, they broke in, and the man started shooting. He killed Copley and wounded Smith Ball—not seriously. Then the boys got excited and got that mountain howitzer which Captain Fisk left here last year and fired a couple of shells plumb through the cabin, not to mention a couple of hundred rounds from pistols and rifles. I got there in time to help drag Pizanthia out. He'd been wounded, but just how seriously I can't say. That mob had strung him up to a pole before you could say scat. They shot him full of holes while he was hanging, and then set fire to his cabin and cut him down and tossed him in the fire."

"My God!" Jesse exclaimed. "That's—that's plain savagery, John!"

"It's nothing else," Sanders interjected, "but it's over now. Harry King and some others with more sense than Copley and Ball have matters in hand. We've got to profit from that lesson, though. If mobs are permitted to run hog-wild there'll be hell to pay—if you'll excuse me, Mrs. Minor—all over the country. Only the committees must be allowed to issue any orders, and only the executive officers, regularly appointed, should carry out those orders. That means that we'll have to get back to Alder Gulch—all of us—ahead of the news about Plummer and his deputies."

"He's right, Jesse," Lott added. "There are half a dozen or more men on that list who are in the Gulch right now. Maybe we can't beat the news there, but we can get in right on top of it if we work fast."

Jesse did not reply immediately.

"When are you leaving?" he asked finally.

"Just as soon as we can get a bite to eat and get horses saddled. Let's say two o'clock."

"Make it ten after," said Jesse. "That will give us time for a drink first—here and now. Ann, will you get that bottle of Amontillado and glasses." His eyes sought hers and held them. *Jesse, what are you saying? Am I going to lose you again, so soon.*

"I want you to drink a toast with me, men," Jesse continued evenly. "Mrs. Minor will ride with us. She has decided to make her home with me in Alder Gulch."

Chapter XVIII

I

IT WAS NEARER four o'clock than two before they left Bannack. The horses stood saddled for more than an hour while Lott talked with Harry King, president of the Bannack Committee, and other men. Twice Ann heard the name of Dutch John mentioned, and she gathered that Wagner had accepted his fate placidly but had refused to make any confession or to tell whither his accomplice, Marshland, had fled. An interpreter had been located, and King and the others wanted Lott and Sanders to question Wagner again with the interpreter's aid. Lott refused with almost the precise words Jesse had used that morning.

"No!" he snapped. "You've got a committee now, or are supposed to have, and you've got to handle things for yourselves. And," he added sharply, "no bungling and no more disgraceful affairs like this morning. That's final."

He turned his back on King and mounted. The others followed him, the horses snorting and prancing to record their delight in being in motion at last. Ann pulled her scarf higher about her face and hoped that none of the men of Bannack would recognize her.

"They've got other things on their minds, my dear," Jesse

laughed. "Great grief, Ann, don't you think that men know that women have legs?"

"Jesse, please. It's bad enough for me to know I'm dressed like this—in men's clothes and riding like a man—without you making fun of me. What will Mr. Lott and Mr. Sanders think? It's positively indelicate."

"But sensible. You can bet Lott and Sanders would prefer a little of what you call indelicacy to the trouble and delay a sore-backed horse can make. This is no country for a side-saddle, as you're due to find out."

It was long after dark when they reached the stage station on Rattlesnake Creek. Bunton, the manager, was gone, and the building was locked, the corrals empty. Ann was already stiff and sore and was little rested by the few hours of sleep she got when the four lay down on the hay in one of the barns.

"You're lucky at that," Jesse said. "If we'd found horses here we'd have pushed on, but our nags need rest. Just take off your boots and loosen your belt, Ann."

She noticed that Lott and Sanders were doing as Jesse had advised her. None of the three seemed to think there was anything unusual in the circumstance of three men and a woman sleeping side by side on saddleblankets spread on the hay. Jesse was on one side of her. She could have touched Wilbur Sanders on the other.

Lott roused them at three o'clock. There was no moon; but the Northern Lights swept in great bars of pale red and green across the sky, and only in the shadow of the bluff was the narrow, rutted road invisible and terrifying. Dawn found them on the south side of the Beaverhead, and they ate breakfast in the middle of the forenoon at Dempsey's Cottonwood Ranch. From there, with fresh horses, they pounded steadily along the better road which lay between the Passamari and the foothills of the Tobacco Roots. Once Lott checked his horse until she and Jesse came abreast of him.

"Why don't you stop at Laurin's, Jesse?" he asked. "You could get a rig there and—"

"No!" Ann shouted. "I won't hear of it, Mr. Lott. Ride on

and don't think about me. I'll keep up." To herself she added: "If it kills me."

It did not kill her, but as the long hours passed death would have been a rather welcome relief. Lott and Sanders rode in the lead, their shoulders square and uncompromising, and Jesse was at her side. They were weary, these men, as weary as herself. No one of flesh and blood could ride seventy miles over frozen roads and not be weary. None of the three betrayed his weariness, however; Jesse was almost merry. He rode—as he did all things—well, shifting easily with the horse's motion nor seeming to notice the sudden changes in pace which set every tortured muscle in her body screaming and brought agony to her chafed thighs. She saw as through a mist things he pointed out. Laurin's ranch, where Yeager and Brown had been hanged; the saddle in the Snowcrest range through which passed the new road to Great Salt Lake City; Ramshorn Gulch in the Tobacco Roots—"That's where the big nuggets come from, Ann. I staked two fellows who were among the first to go in there, and I've made a thousand per cent on the investment already."

Occasionally they met other riders on the road. Sanders shouted to one of them, and the man wheeled and rode for a space with the lawyer and Lott. Then Lott turned in his saddle and shouted to Jesse that everything was all right. The road climbed over a long spur which thrust out from the mountains, and suddenly there were houses on either hand; houses and stores and saloons and smithies where oxen bellowed and grimy men swung on the long bellows handles. Junction, Adobetown, Nevada, Central, Virginia City—Jesse named the towns, one after another, as the horses plodded through the frozen slush of the rutted road which crossed and recrossed icebound Alder Creek. To Ann the whole gulch was one town, one long wicked town which lay along the creek like a snake. The names dated from the first rush, when the little clusters of cabins and tents and wickiups had indeed been separate, but now no man could say where one town ended and another began. Then Sanders and Lott, with a wave of their hands, turned off into a rutted by-street, and she and Jesse rode on to a tie-rail in front of a rough, two-story

building which bore the sign, Virginia Hotel. She stared helplessly at her husband as he dismounted.

"I can't make it, Jesse; you'll have to help me. I kept up, though, didn't I?"

"You did, bless you. One of Sheridan's troopers couldn't have done better. Now, come."

She took his hands and managed somehow to swing her right leg over the cante. Jesse half-carried her into the hotel and guided her to the stairs, shouting orders meanwhile to a wide-eyed man who stared from over a high desk in one corner.

"Call someone to take care of our horses, Ennis, and tell your wife to heat some water for Mrs. Minor. Jump, man!"

He laid Ann on the bed and drew the curtains at the window. She felt she should protest as Jesse loosened her belt and tugged at her heavy boots, but it was infinitely easier to lie there and move no more than was necessary while he undressed her, clumsily but gently, and drew over her head one of his own nightgowns.

"Here's Mrs. Ennis, Ann, with a tub. Take a hot bath, my dear, and then get to bed. Do you think you could eat something?"

"Not a bite, Jesse."

"Ow, but you must, ma'am." Mrs. Ennis's voice was a high-pitched Cockney whine. "A cup o' tea, naow, and a bit of toast. I'll 'ave them for you in a jiffy."

"I think that's a good idea, Mrs. Ennis"—Jesse spoke for her—"put the tub down, please, and start bringing the hot water. You'll find you're hungry, Ann—and you'll also find a bottle of brandy in the cupboard. Take a big drink. I'll be back some time, but don't ask me when."

She bathed, found that she was ravenously hungry, and ate the fried ham and scones with wild plum preserves, and drank the tea which the Englishwoman brought her. She was asleep almost as soon as her head struck the pillow. She awoke to find Jesse, dressed except for boots and coat, at her side. Someone was knocking on the door.

"Mr. Minor, Mr. Minor." It was the landlord's voice. "You told me to call you at six."

"All right, Ennis." Jesse rolled to the edge of the bed and sat up. "God's glory, this place is cold. Well, five hours' sleep is five more than none."

"You must be made of iron, Jesse."

"I've got company, then. Sanders and Lott were up, too, and I'll bet Jim Williams hasn't closed his eyes tonight." He lit the lamp, then stuffed shavings into the sheetiron stove and piled in kindling. He lifted and shook a teakettle which stood on the flat top of the stove. "Stay in bed and keep warm until I'm through shaving, Ann. One should be clean-shaven and neatly dressed for funerals, you know."

"Funerals?" she echoed.

"Several of them, I hope most sincerely." The words were jesting, but there was no laughter in his eyes. "The Committee considered evidence against six men last night, and they'll be rounded up at first crack of dawn. They'll be hanged as promptly as possible. I tell you all this so you won't be tempted to step outdoors this morning."

"I hate to think of your going, Jesse, but of course you've got to."

"No getting out of it." He ran the razor carefully along his lean jaw. "Besides, there's a man I've got to see before the arrests are made."

He shaved and dressed, then bent over the bed and kissed her. Kisses were not yet commonplace between them, and his lips clung to hers. On this morning she saw no tenderness in his eyes. They were gray and very cold.

"I'll find that fellow, Ann, and then—unless something prevents—I'll come back and have breakfast with you."

The door closed behind him, but she did not hear his footsteps on the uncarpeted stairs. She ran across the room, noiselessly opened the door, and peered through the crack. The hall was gray in the early light, and she saw Jesse standing at the head of the stairs with one of the short-barreled Colt revolvers in either hand. His thumbs were crooked over the hammer spurs, and he raised and lowered half a dozen times the hammer of each weapon, then tested the caps to make certain all were

tight on the nipples. Satisfied, he returned the guns to the holsters that were sewn inside the band of his trousers and pulled his vest down over the ivory stocks. She had seen him inspect those revolvers many times, but there was a purposefulness in his manner this morning that set her heart to pounding. She waited until he had gone down stairs, then closed the door and dressed as swiftly as she could find the wrinkled garments which had come from Bannack in the blanket roll behind her saddle. She hurried across the tiny lobby, but a man halted her as she tried to pass out the door to the street. Beyond him, on the uneven sidewalk in the front of the hotel, were two others.

"Sorry, ma'am," he said politely, "but you can't go outside for a while yet."

"Mr. Minor—" she began.

"Them's orders, ma'am." He stood squarely in front of her, and she turned back and entered the dining room. No one was there, but soiled dishes and cups were on one table. She went to the window which looked out on Wallace Street and parted the sleazy curtains. There was no sign of any excitement, but when she looked toward the hills which crowded so closely upon the narrow gulch she saw a man standing on the crest, a rifle in the crook of his arm. His figure was a dark silhouette against the brightening sky. Two men, heavily wrapped against the cold, passed the window. A third man turned a corner which was just visible to her right and cut across Wallace Street toward the hotel. He had reached the middle of the street when she heard Jesse's voice, as clear and as cold as the winter morning.

"You're under arrest, Boone. Take your choice and take it fast. Either put up your hands or start something!"

Jesse had stepped off the low sidewalk and was facing the other man. Not fifteen feet separated them; and, in the second of silence which followed on Jesse's challenge, Ann recognized the stranger and knew that these two had faced one another before. Temple Street in Great Salt Lake City and Jesse crowding her against a wall while he placed his body between her and this same man. She could never forget that bestial face with

the cruel cold eyes and the thick lips which writhed back to reveal dirty yellow teeth. . . . Jesse had called him Boone, and the other name was Helm. Boone Helm.

Her recollection of that scene, her recognition of the man, had been instantaneous. The scene before her now had not changed in the slightest detail. Helm did not obey the order to raise his hands, nor did he accept the alternative of "starting something." He merely stood motionless and faced his challenger. Jesse seemed to be waiting. His coat was open, his left hand hung at his side, and the thumb of his right was hooked carelessly in the lower pocket of his flowered vest. *He's going to kill that man*, she thought. *It's not like that time in Ogden City, where he was just playing with that three-fingered man. This time he's going to kill.*

Seconds passed, and still neither man moved. Then, at last, Helm spoke. She saw the thick lips move beneath the unkempt mustache, but she could not hear the words. Jesse's reply was clearly audible.

"You're a liar, Boone. You know you've got a gun, and I know it. You'd no more leave off your gun than you'd leave off your pants. Go for it—or reach!"

More seconds passed. Ann could not see a muscle move in Helm's sallow face, but Jesse must have read there something which was invisible to her eyes. He spat disgustedly.

"Come on and get him, men," he called. "He's not buying any arguments this morning. He does his shooting in the back—and you've fired your last shot, Boone."

The two men stepped into the street. They carried pistols in their hands and approached Helm cautiously until they were so close that one of them shoved the muzzle of his weapon into Helm's stomach. The outlaw raised his hands above his head. His lips moved again, and this time Ann heard what he said.

"You son of a bitch!" he screamed hoarsely. "You son of a bitch! You son—"

The third repetition was drowned in the laughter of the men who were disarming him. Other men, who stood in front of the hotel, were laughing too. Even Jesse was laughing as though

Boone Helm had repeated the best joke which Alder Gulch had heard in months. *Dear God, what is funny in that? It's—well, I've heard it often enough since we left St. Joe, but it's a terrible thing to say, and it can't be funny, ever.* She sat down in the nearest chair. A moment later she saw Jesse in the small lobby and called to him.

"I'm in here, Jesse."

"Don't tell me you've had breakfast already. I thought I told you—"

"I haven't had breakfast. Jesse, I saw everything that happened just now—out there in the street."

"Nothing happened, Ann; nothing at all." He smiled slowly.

"Don't play with me, Jesse, and please don't treat me as if I was a child. That was Boone Helm, the man we saw that day in Great Salt Lake City. What is he doing here—and why did you do what you did?"

"All that before breakfast?"

"Please, Jesse—"

"All right." He was suddenly grave. "Boone's been around this country for three months or more, but we just haven't crossed trails. I've been too busy to go after him, and we never happened to run into each other. I wanted to meet him, too—I really did. He's the only man I can remember that I was afraid of—sick afraid, as though I'd stepped on a snake in my bare feet in the dark. I wanted to see him again."

"But why? I can't understand."

"Try. Fear is a disease, Ann. It's catching. That day in Salt Lake, I felt empty inside. I had to face up with Boone Helm again to find out if that empty feeling was just because I had you with me or if it was—well, something else. So when his name was voted on last night I served notice that I was going to make the arrest. The rest you saw."

"But he didn't—"

"No. He was carrying two guns, too—a Navy Colt in a holster and a derringer in his side pocket—but he never went after them. He's a thief and a killer and a couple of other things, but he hasn't enough leather in him to stand face to face and trade

shots. I was rather glad to find that out, although it made me ashamed of myself to learn that I'd been afraid of a snake—like a silly woman who finds a mouse in her flour barrel."

He kissed her pale lips. She returned the caress, but her eyes turned instinctively toward the lobby.

"Was anybody looking, Ann—and what if they were? Talk about looking before you leap—ever since I've been old enough to want to kiss a girl I've wondered why a woman—any woman—always looks before she kisses. Does she want an audience, or is she afraid of one? We're married, Ann—there's some difference between kissing your husband and being taken in adultery."

"Jesse! How can you say things like that?"

"You're shocked—that's fine!—and at the same time you're trying not to laugh, and that's better. I hate to see you looking like a rabbit facing a blacksnake. You're living in the Rocky Mountains, Ann, not Ohio, and sooner or later you've got to quit measuring everything with a Painesville yardstick. Now let's eat."

"Let's—and I won't be a baby again, Jesse." *I won't. I've got to show him I'm a grown woman and can—what would he say?—can carry my end of the log. I'm not scared for myself, Jesse. It's you. If anything happened to you now, I'd die. I think I understand things better. You were searching your soul when you walked out to meet that man, trying to find fear there. That's what kept us apart so long; you want other people to search their souls, too. There's something in you that's as cold as granite, and I think I'm the only person who has ever warmed it even a little bit. You won't let yourself bend or break—and oh, my darling, I hope you never will!*

2

The Vigilance Committee of the Alder Gulch towns hanged five men in Virginia City that afternoon. A group known as the Ferreting Committee had been working busily ever since Erastus Yeager, at the gallows' foot, had confessed his membership in the outlaw organization and had named its fellows from

Henry Plummer and the crafty Skinner to the lowest roadster and messenger. Men who had been robbed, assaulted, and threatened were interviewed, and—freed at last from terror—they talked freely. The evidence thus gathered had been considered by the Executive Committee. Six men had been tried, condemned, and sentenced in the course of a session which had lasted until long past midnight. Pickets were then placed so as to surround the gulch completely, and orders issued for the arrest, on sight, of the condemned men. Only five were captured. Bill Hunter had been warned and had escaped through the tightly drawn cordon.

The five—Clubfoot George Lane, Jack Gallagher, Boone Helm, Haze Lyons, and Frank Parrish—stood on packing boxes beneath the roof beam of the unfinished building which was to be Clayton and Hall's drugstore at the corner of Van Buren and Wallace Streets and were hanged in that order. Three met death with dignity. Gallagher and Helm shouted ribaldries and profane jests to the last. Asked if he had a final request, Gallagher demanded—and received—a drink of whisky, and cursed the Vigilante who did not slacken the rope about his neck sufficiently to permit him to drink comfortably. The box was jerked from beneath his feet as he screamed a last defiance. Helm coolly watched his struggles.

"Kick away, old boy. I'll be in hell with you in a minute!"

He felt the box twitch as his executioners drew up the slack in the cords. "Every man for his principles," he bellowed. "Hurrah for Jeff Davis! Let her rip!"

It was courage of a kind—and it assured notoriety. Men were to remember the ribaldries of Gallagher and Helm long after they had forgotten the quiet dignity of Frank Parrish and his request that his face be covered with his scarf to conceal his death agonies.

The five bodies hung for two hours, then were cut down and buried side by side on the summit of Cemetery Hill, north of the straggling town. Fires had burned there all afternoon to melt the frozen ground.

Ann learned those details only long afterward and fragmen-

tarily. She remained in the hotel all afternoon and peeped from the window only once, moved by a morbid curiosity to see the five, when their escorts halted them until word came that all was ready at the place selected for execution. She saw William Dance step from among the men on the sidewalk and kneel in the snow beside George Lane, the clubfooted cobbler who had worked in Dance's store.

"George asked Dance to pray for him," said Jesse briefly when she mentioned the incident. Neither he nor Clem, who ate with them in the hotel dining room that night, added to the statement or made other comments, even indirect, on the duties which had engaged them that day. Once, with no thought other than to break a long silence, she spoke of the idle wagons and of the oxen which were eating their heads off on expensive hay. Goods ordered from the East had reached Great Salt Lake City. The mail coaches were getting through over the frozen roads, why not a wagon train?

"Mebbe in a couple of weeks 'r thereabouts," said Clem, disinterestedly. "I got another job of work t' tend to first."

3

Clem returned just before sundown of a clear, cold day early in February. Ann had walked down the hill to Lott's store in Nevada and had almost reached her destination when she saw Talbot and Tom Pitt riding past. They drew rein as she called to them. She beckoned to Clem, and he rode to the edge of the sidewalk and shook hands with her.

"Howdy, Miss Ann. . . . Oh, I been ridin' round. Big Hole an' Deer Lodge an' Hell Gate an' all round. I reckon I'm back t' stay f'r a spell now." His eyes were bloodshot, and the odor of whisky was heavy on his breath. He must have seen her sniff and suspected her disapproval, for he added: "I'm all right, ma'am. It's almighty cold ridin', an' we stopped in f'r a couple of snorts at Tim's place in Junction. I'm jest tired, that's all. I'm goin' up t' Jesse's cabin an' turn in. I'm all right."

He was not all right, she knew instinctively. He seemed steady enough in his saddle as he kicked his weary mount into a

shambling trot, but he was not all right. That conviction grew, and she paid little attention to the dress materials which Lott's clerk showed her or to the black stockings—"the very newest thing from the East"—with cotton tops and feet but with real silk from below the knee to the ankle. She told the clerk irritably that she didn't care for the dress materials and that the stockings were both expensive and silly, and left the store.

Smoke was rising from the chimney of the cabin which Jesse had built on his arrival in Alder Gulch, and a saddle had been thrown carelessly on the snow-covered ground beside the door. It was not like Clem to treat his equipment so carelessly. She turned off Wallace Street and climbed the steep grade to the cabin. The door yielded as she raised the wooden latch. Clem was seated at a table on which stood a bottle of whisky and a tumbler.

"Clem!" She closed the door quickly behind her. "What's the matter, Clem?"

"This here's no place f'r you, Miss Ann. Jest go on an' leave me alone f'r a spell."

There was food on the table; a loaf of bread and a small package which held sliced boiled ham and thick slabs of cheese. The wrapping had opened, revealing the parcel's contents. Paper was precious in the mining camps. Only perishable foodstuffs were wrapped, and with the scantiest allowance of paper. Clem had bought food; but he had bought whisky too, and it was to the whisky that he had turned as soon as he had built the fire. Ann drew another chair to the table and sat down beside him.

"Clem, we've been friends ever since that day in St. Joe when you came to my father and said you'd heard he wanted to hire a good teamster. This"—the wedding ring on her left hand clinked against the bottle—"this isn't like you, Clem. Won't you tell me what's the matter?"

"Nawthin', Miss Ann—leastaways, nawthin' much. If y' got t' know, I been tryin' t' git drunk f'r th' past ten days, an' couldn't. Now I aim t' go 'bout it serious an' find out if'n I kin. There ain't no harm in that, is they, 'r any law agin it? Jest leave me alone, ma'am."

"No! Not until you tell me why."

"It's none of yore business why!" he growled. "I got good an' sufficient persnal an' private reasons t' git drunker'n thutty-seven hoot-owls. Ain't that enough?"

"Yes. We're partners, Clem; we're the T-M Company, you and I. If there's good reason for one partner to get drunk, there's reason for both. We'll get drunk together." She half-filled the tumbler. It was at her lips before Clem pushed her hand aside so roughly that the spilled liquor soaked her sleeve.

"Miss Ann, f'r God's sake—"

"Why not, Clem? We're partners, aren't we?"

"Not in this here we ain't, ma'am. If yuh got t' know, I aim t' git drunk jest so I c'n f'rgit what I been doin' an' seein' these last two weeks. I've rode clear t' Hell Gate—" He was suddenly silent, then slowly lifted his head and stared into her eyes.

"I spoke truer than I thought, Miss Ann. Whoever named that town was a prophet. I'm no chicken-liver, you know that, ma'am, but I'm tellin' you I've rode t' Hell Gate more ways than one. Mebbe likker 'll help me f'rgit th' wolves tryin' t' git at dead Steve Marshland 'cause his frozen feet had mortified an' stunk like catfish bait. Or Johnny Cooper—he'd been shot in th' leg, an' we set him on a handsled and dragged him down t' Higgins' corral like he was a baby, an' then we hanged him. He stood on th' same box we'd used f'r Cy Skinner, an' he asked us if we minded waitin' ontill he'd finished th' pipe he was smokin'. Bill Graves was another—up at Fort Owen. Thar wasn't nothin' t' use f'r a drop, an' we set him on a hoss's rump, an' th' feller ther was ridin' th' hoss hollered, 'Good-by, Bill,' as he druv in th' spurs an' jumped th' hoss out from under Whisky Bill. What did he have t' holler 'Good-by, Bill' for, I'd like t' know."

"You hanged that many men? Oh, Clem, no wonder you want to forget."

"I didn't name more'n th' half of 'em, Miss Ann," said Talbot grimly. "It was on th' fifteenth we left here, an' by th' twenty-sixth we'd strung up eight. It was my tough luck t' have t' help with all of 'em."

"Poor Clem! Keep on talking, Clem, if it makes you feel any better. There's coffee in that jar on the shelf, and I'm going to grind some and boil up a pot for us both. We'll have something to eat, too."

"It's gittin' late, Miss Ann. Won't Jesse be lookin' fr ye?"

"No. He rode over to Ramshorn Gulch this afternoon and"—she added a lie to that truth—"he won't be back until tomorrow. Take a drink now if you want one, Clem."

She watched him closely as he poured a modest drink in the bottom of the tumbler, then downed it at a gulp. He made no move to refill the glass.

"I wish I c'd be like either Jim Williams 'r X. Biedler," he said querulously. "Jim, he's jest cold steel an' whalebone. T' him th' whole business was jest a job thet th' sooner done th' sooner he c'd git back t' his ranch on Williams Creek. It was like he was layin' out in th' snow t' shoot th' coyotes that was killin' his chickens. He didn't have no special pers'nal grudge agin th' coyotes, an' he didn't relish bein' cold an' hongry; but coyotes an' chickens couldn't live in th' same country, an' it was his job t' git rid of 'em.

"X. Biedler, he was jest th' opposite. He liked it—I swear t' God he did. He'd sooner hang a man than eat a squar' meal. Time an' again he bemoaned because he wasn't took t' Bannack t' help string up Buck Stinson. X. claimed Buck owed him a hangin' 'count of bein' left go after killin' Dillingham last summer. Hangin' an' killin' has got in his blood, an' he'll never git over it."

The coffee was boiling. She filled a cup and set it before him with the ham and cheese sandwiches she had made from the food he had brought. He ate slowly at first, then wolfishly. She drank a cup of coffee and—when his eyes were on her—munched ostentatiously of bread and cheese. Clem's hand trembled noticeably as he reached for a second sandwich, and the thought struck her like a blow that he was an old man. He had been grizzled when he had joined the wagon train at St. Joseph; now his hair was white in the lamplight, and the three-day stubble of beard on cheeks and chin was silvery. Yet—she

thought hastily—he was only fifty years old. At one of their early camps on the Platte he had remarked that he had been twenty-four years old when the Mormon War had flared across western Missouri. Her father had laughed and said, "Shucks, Clem, here I've been thinking you were a grown man, and now you confess you're only forty-eight!" That had been less than two years ago, that camp on the Platte, and Clem was now old. His hand trembled like Gran'ther Fairchild's—and gran'ther was eighty-eight when he died and remembered clearly the terrors of the Revolution when Brant and Walter Butler had swept the Mohawk Valley with fire and massacre and torture and his own father had died in the fighting at Oriskany. Fifty wasn't old—not when you thought of eighty-eight—but Clem had grown old in less than two years in the mountains. Would she and Jesse . . .

"'Twasn't like them fellers didn't need hangin'." Clem, his mouth full, took up his tale. "They did, every last one of 'em. What made it so tarnation hard f'r me was that they acted like hooman bein's. I kept tryin' t' tell myself about all th' things they'd done an' about the pore little Dutchman, Nick, bein' roped an' dragged 'fore he was shot, but it didn't help much. When they seen all th' cards was out, an' that they had t' take what was comin' to 'em, they all of 'em took it like men. I wish they hadn't."

He picked up the tumbler, and she watched him tensely; but he ignored the whisky bottle and filled the glass from the pail of water which he had placed on the bench by the fireplace.

"The ham was allowed to lay in th' brine too long, Miss Ann," he remarked, "'r mebbe it was eatin' near a pound thet made me so thirsty. I didn't know I was hongry till y' started throwin' them san'wiches at me."

Food, she thought. *That's the answer.* She should have recognized Clem's condition and bought meat and potatoes and cooked him a real meal. She spoke with all the enthusiasm she could muster.

"I'm hungry, too, Clem, and there's a good restaurant right next to Paris Pfouts's store. Jesse and I ate there last Sunday,

and they had buffalo meat—hump ribs—that had been brought frozen from somewhere 'way below Fort Benton. Let's go there, you and I, and get the best and biggest meal they can serve."

She seized her coat and fur cap and ran to the door. The cold night air slashed into the room like a sword, and Talbot shivered as he pushed the door closed.

"I've had enough t' eat, Miss Ann, an' I'm dead sleepy. All I really want t' do is t' pile into that bunk yonder an' sleep f'r a week."

"Of course, Clem." *Oh, thank God!* "Sleep will do you more good than anything. I'll be gone before you can say scat."

He helped her with the heavy bearskin coat.

"F'r days now, every chance I got, I been drinkin' like—like Bill Fairweather. Mebbe you'd best take that there bottle 'long with you, ma'am."

"And then what, Clem? If you woke up and wanted a drink and the bottle wasn't here, you'd put your clothes on and go get one. Take a drink if you want one, partner."

"I don't reckon I'll be wantin' none." He shuffled and would not meet her eyes. "G'd night, Miss Ann. It was handsome of you t' come up an' bile thet pot of cawfee f'r me."

"Good night, Clem."

She hurried along the steep, twisting course of Wallace Street. Tinny pianos jangled, and fiddles screeched and wailed from the hurdy-houses; there was the rumble of male laughter and deep-voiced conversation from the saloons. Every third building of the long, brawling town was a saloon, a dancehall or hurdy-house, or a gambling house—frequently a combination of all three—but of the men she encountered on the rough sidewalks none spoke to her or passed some rude witticism with his neighbor. The organization of the Vigilance Committee had raised in no small degree the general standard of Alder Gulch.

It's 'way past supper time, and I wonder where Jesse thinks I've been. I think he'll be proud of me, though, when I tell him how I handled things tonight. Poor Clem! He let me look right into his soul and then acted as though he was ashamed of what

I saw there. Why do men act as though having a heart was something shameful?

4

There was more in store for her that night. Just below the hotel was the Bella Union, one of Virginia's City's many saloons, its entrance illumined by a flaming naphtha torch. She was nearing the place when the door opened and several men emerged, two of whom supported a third, who was helplessly drunk. Ann stepped hastily around the group and hurried toward the hotel. She heard, but paid little attention to, a series of commands in a woman's voice.

"Take him back inside—he'll freeze out here. Hurry! I'll be back in a couple of minutes and take him home." There followed the thudding of footsteps on the board sidewalk, and fingers touched Ann's arm. "Mrs. Minor, I've got to speak to you. Please."

The speaker was a tall woman and strikingly handsome. Black hair curled from beneath a large, turbanlike hat of silver-gray wolfskin, and she wore an ankle-length coat of the same fur. The coat was open, and Ann saw a barbaric necklace of huge nuggets about a smooth white throat.

"Don't you—can't you remember me, Mrs. Minor?"

Ann raised her eyes to the woman's face. A bold face, a face to match the magnificent full-breasted body. Red lips, cheeks which glowed healthily beneath unnecessary rouge, and dark eyes that seemed as large as silver dollars. It was a face that no one could easily forget—least of all another woman—and Ann said, "I remember you," quietly as her thoughts leaped in one swift stride across the months to Townsend's hotel in Great Salt Lake City and a girl who was frightened and angry and terribly hurt as she clutched the coverlid about her throat and stared across the footboard of her bridal bed into these same black eyes. "*So you're married, Jess? Well, you've warmed plenty of beds in your time, and most of them had women in them. . .*" She had said something like that, this woman, and Jesse had

closed the door after she had gone and spoken just one terrible word.

"I don't blame you for looking at me like that, Mrs. Minor. It would have served me right if Jesse had laid into me with a quirt there in Great Salt Lake City. Even being half drunk like I was didn't give me any excuse—and now I've got to ask a favor of you."

"Won't you come inside? We can't talk very well out here on the street," Ann spoke calmly. The fear and the anger had gone, and little remained of the hurt; there remained only surprise that the woman had turned up here in Virginia City. Still, Boone Helm had been in "Mormontown," as the freighters called the Utah capital, and he had come to Alder Gulch. If gold drew male human wolves like Helm and Gallagher, it should attract the females as well. She opened the door and led the way to the dining room, now lighted only by the hanging lamp at the foot of the stairs. The woman followed her.

"Saying I'm sorry for what happened wouldn't mend matters," she began. "All I want to tell you is that I'm married now. I'm Maria Virginia Slade—Mrs. Joseph Slade. 'Cap' Slade, my husband's called."

The tumblers of memory fell into place and opened another door upon the past. "Cap" Slade! That was the name of the Overland agent at Platte Forks, the man upon whom the women of the train stared from a distance, Cap Slade, the killer, the man who carried in his pocket the dried ears of one of his many victims. His name was a byword over the entire Overland system. Jesse had called him a drunken four-flusher or something like that. And he was here in Virginia, too, and he'd married this Molly! It was all too mixed up. She'd probably meet the Reverend Hurrell, pastor of the Painesville Baptist Church, next. . . .

"We've got a ranch over on the Madison side of the Divide," the woman continued. "Joe's been running a freight outfit from Benton here ever since this camp started. I've seen you here in the Gulch three or four times, but whenever I did I turned the first corner or crossed the street. I didn't want to come face to face with you." She gripped the back of a chair with her mit-

tened hands. The words tumbled from her lips. "And then tonight when I seen—saw you coming I just said to myself that this dodging and hiding couldn't go on. I told the boys to take Joe back inside the Bella so he wouldn't freeze. I just had to have it out with you."

"I don't think there's anything for us to have out, Mrs. Slade."

"That's what you say, just like Jesse said you would, but—"

"Oh, you've seen Mr. Minor, then?"

"Yes—but not what you're thinking, Mrs. Minor. My God, no! Joe and I came face to face with him the first night we were in the Gulch; and Jesse shook hands with us both and told Joe he was a lucky man, and he bought a bottle of wine. Joe went over to speak to some fellows he knew, and Jesse told me not to worry about making a damn fool of myself there in the Salt Lake House. He told me you weren't the kind that held spite."

"I won't lie to you, Mrs. Minor, and tell you Jesse and I were just good friends and that I didn't know what I was saying that night. You know better than that. You're married and you understand how things can be between a man and a woman"—*I'm married, and I can understand. I've heard something like that ever since I was thirteen.* "You'll be married some day, dear, and then you'll understand." *Is that what marriage is—understanding how things can be between a man and a woman?* She turned her head so that her face was wholly in shadow—"I was mean as dirt to you, Mrs. Minor. I tried to hurt you and Jesse both. And—and then I took the Overland east. I was going to go home to Michigan; but at Diamond Springs station there was a coach bound for Denver City and the Pike's Peak camps, and I took it. I met Joe Slade in Aurora, and we were married. He knows I've been around—I was keeping cases in a faro game when he first saw me—but there's plenty of things he don't know. Jesse will give me a break, like I thought he would. I've never known a man to kick a woman down after she'd got up—but women can't forget like men can, so they can't forgive. I know I've got no right to ask you to forgive me, but can you? I'd kill myself if Joe Slade ever knew what you know. . . ."

She was weeping now, and the tears plowed ugly furrows

through the powder on her cheeks. Ann fumbled in her reticule for a handkerchief and wiped the streaming eyes, then tried unskillfully to repair the damages to the painted complexion.

"You didn't have to tell me all that."

"I know, but once I got started I just couldn't stop until it was all out, Mrs. Minor."

"My name is Ann; call me that. Not Annie—I hate that name—just Ann. And I'll call you—what? Jesse called you Molly; will that do? And all I know about you, Molly, is that you're an old friend of Jesse's and mine. How's that?"

Maria Virginia threw her arms about Ann's shoulders and kissed her again and again.

"Oh, Mrs. Minor—Ann, I mean. I've got no right to ask God to do anything for me, but I'll sure ask Him to bless you for what you've said tonight. It'd be different if I didn't love Joe Slade, but I do. He's not like Jesse—looking ahead all the time. When Alder Gulch plays out, like all gold camps do, you'll find out Jesse called the turn six months before. Joe Slade's got the name of being too quick on the fight, and he drinks a heap too much and don't know how to handle his liquor; but I love him. You understand, don't you?"

Ann waited in the semidarkness of the dining room until Maria Virginia had left the hotel, then climbed the stairs to her room. Ennis, the proprietor, was standing in the doorway which led to the barroom, and she wondered how much of the passionate outburst he had heard.

Yes, I guess I understand. But she should have known that I—even if I met Mr. Slade, which isn't very likely, I couldn't have even hinted at anything like that. Just the same, I don't think I'll say anything to Jesse about it. She was grateful. She kissed me as though—I've never had a woman kiss me like that. Women peck, but she really kissed.

She scrubbed her flaming cheeks to remove any of Molly's rouge which had been transferred to them, then entered the room. Jesse was seated by the stove, his stockinged feet on a chair, reading an old copy of the *New York Herald*. She stooped and kissed him.

"I hope you had your supper, Ann. I didn't wait for you."

"What a thing to say! Aren't you going to glare at me and ask me where in the—you know—I've been? It's nearly ten o'clock."

"Ann! You should know that curiosity isn't one of my faults. Your time's your own—and it just happens that I trust you. Now, did you have your supper?"

"No—I mean yes. I had something to eat with Clem."

"He's back, then."

"Yes, and—oh, Jesse, there's so much I've got to tell you about him."

It was flattering to have Jesse listen so intently. Usually when she ran to him with bits of gossip which she thought would interest him, it was only to learn that he had heard the same rumor in greater detail three days before and that some one of the Committee's many investigators had tracked it to its source. Tonight, though, was different, although he seemed to have little interest in Clem's distress and drew her back again and again to the activities of the posse which had ridden out of Alder Gulch the day following the execution of Boone Helm and his four companions. The Committee had received authoritative word only of the hanging of Steve Marshland at Clarke's ranch on the Bighole River. Williams and Paris Pfout had been too busy since then to seek a courier to carry a report to their superiors. Ann repeated those names and places which she could recall and added that Clem had said eight men had been summarily executed.

"They cleaned up," said Jesse grimly. "Except maybe for that Mexican over in Bannack there hasn't been a man hanged who hadn't earned hanging a dozen times."

Once he laughed—when she told him of filling the glass and of Clem's knocking it away from her lips.

"What put that into your head, Ann? Did you think you could match old Clem Talbot drink for drink and remain upright?"

"I don't know what gave me the idea. I just thought that

Clem was fond of me—and he is you know—and that he just wouldn't drink if he knew I was going to drink too."

"It seems to have worked," said Jesse, "but suppose it hadn't? Would you have gone through with it if the notion of partners getting drunk together had appealed to Clem?"

"Yes!" She faced him bravely. "Even if it had meant getting intoxicated, I'd have gone through with it—so there!"

"Good for you! You've come a long, long way from Painesville, Ann."

"Jesse! And I thought you were serious."

"I was, and I am. I'm proud of you, Ann. You wouldn't have lasted twenty minutes matching drinks with an old hand like Clem, but you made a play and were willing to back it with your last chip. That's something to admire in anyone. As far as Clem is concerned, don't worry about him. He spoke his piece, and he spoke it to a woman—and a woman is a thousand times better than a priest at such a time—and then he went to sleep. He's a tough old rooster, Ann, and by morning he'll be ashamed of his moment of weakness. Whatever happens, don't ever tell him that you told me about it. That's the one thing Clem could never forgive."

"All that's easy to say, Jesse, but you didn't see Clem and I did. I can't help worrying about him. He's aged ten years in these last two weeks. His hair is really white, and his hands shake like—"

"Liquor!" Jesse interrupted. "Lord, Ann, he told you he'd been piling it in every chance he got. Of course he's shaky—and if you hadn't steered him away from that bottle he'd have been seeing things. He'll get over it."

"I wish I thought you were right," she began.

"You'll know tomorrow. If the old rascal sleeps till noon and wakes up hungry—"

"It's something more than just that, Jesse. I feel responsible for Clem. He'd never have come into this mountain country if it hadn't been for me. Now I wish he'd go back to Missouri or anywhere away from—from these killings and robberies and hangings. How many men have been hanged, Jesse?"

He counted on his fingers.

"I make it twenty-one—including George Ives and Pizanthia and taking Clem's count of eight on the scout to Fort Owen."

"Twenty-one men! In just a little over a month! I—I knew it was horrible, but I didn't dream somehow that it was as bad as that. Let's all of us go away! What with your claims and the T-M Company we're rich—we don't have to stay here. We could sell out and live comfortably anywhere. A half share in the T-M outfit would fix Clem up for the rest of his life."

"Suppose you suggest it to him, Ann. Clem might be willing to buy you out, but he'd never sell. He's prouder of that outfit than a mother of her first child. It's his baby, and it's thriving; and I'd like to see his face and hear his language when you suggest putting it out for adoption. So much for Clem. That leaves you and me, Ann."

"Well—yes, if you put it that way."

"There's no other way to put it. Twenty-one men have been hanged; and you think it's horrible, and you want to shake the dust of this country off your feet forever. Suppose I told you that the Vigilance Committee would be disbanded before the year's out."

"I'd like to believe you, Jesse."

"It's true as gospel—ask Lott or Sanders or Judge Edgerton. We'll have territorial organization before summer—and that means a territorial capital and county organization and courts and schools and all that goes with 'em just as fast as they can be legally set up. There'll be no work for Vigilantes in another year."

"Let's go on to something else, though. You say we're rich and could live anywhere. Maybe so. I've got close to twenty-five thousand dollars to my credit with Welis-Fargo, and I could sell out my holdings here for as much more—although I'd be seven kinds of a fool for doing it. Fifty thousand, cash in hand—then what, Ann?"

"You make it hard, very hard, but if you want an answer—"

"I do."

"Well, there are lots of businesses a man with capital can

engage in. My father was considered quite well-to-do, and he didn't have anywhere near that much money. You could engage in banking or—or shipping—"

"And lose my shirt in six months!" he exploded. "Even if it wasn't my notion of slow death, Ann, how long would I last as a banker or a shipping broker? What do I know about bank loans and mortgages, or bonds, or debentures, or stock issues? Just a little bit less than nothing at all, my dear, and the cost of learning would be every last peso I had in my poke. I'd be worse off than a tenderfoot in a poker game. After all, a tenderfoot might be almighty lucky, and he might win against better players. I've seen it happen—not very often, but it has happened. You can't make a racehorse out of a pack mule, Ann, and by the same token you can't make a banker or a shipping broker out of a man who for more than six years has lived by his wits and his ability to smell a bluff further than Bill Fairweather can smell a drink of liquor."

She hid her hands beneath her skirts to hide from him how tightly her fists were clenched. *I must be calm. I've learned one thing about you and about myself, Jesse, and that is that I must not lose my temper and get angry.*

"Six years," she said slowly. "Has it really been that long?"

"Just about. I started west in '57."

"And this is '64. In another six years it will be 1870, and you'll be nearly forty years old. Will you still be gambling, Jesse?"

"I'll always be a gambler—" He checked himself and looked at her more closely. "God's glory, girl, you're thinking of cards, aren't you? You've never forgotten that imitation emigrant at Sheep Rock or the woman who came and sobbed at my feet and begged me to restore some of my ill-gotten gains. All the gossip you've heard about me, Ann—all the far-fetched conclusions you've drawn that I was robbing the stages and would undoubtedly stretch a rope with my fellow-roadsters—and you never once heard the true gossip that I haven't gambled on any professional sense since we landed, you and I, in Bannack."

"Jesse! You've played cards lots of times. I know you have."

"Don't look pious, please, Ann. I've played cards, and I've

played for high stakes; but always it has been a gentleman's game where every player knew every other. Never—in Bannack or here in the Gulch—have I identified myself in any way with the professional gentry. I've never played where there was a house dealer or a rake-off for the house. It's a very nice distinction, Ann, but an important one if I'm going to live in this country. In another couple of years it will be said that Mr. Minor, who grubstaked Bill Fairweather and was in the first rush to Alder Gulch, enjoys a stiff game of poker with his friends. I'll be respectable, Ann, I'll have a spotless reputation and a couple of hundred thousand dollars—men have become church elders with less."

She knew that she was defeated, but to the end of her life Ann Minor would never willingly admit defeat.

"You could be as respectable in New York or Cleveland, Jesse."

"Not for long. Didn't I tell you that I'd be cleaned out back there in six months? Out here I know all the rules, and I can play the game as I never could in the East. There'll be plenty of opportunities as big as Alder Gulch was, and I'll be on the ground to take advantage of them. Why, when the railroad comes—"

"Jesse!" she expostulated. "That's the biggest gamble I ever heard of. The work has started at both ends of the line, I know, but it's just a political move to keep California satisfied. Even the New York papers say that."

"Those papers will be singing to another tune in a few years," he prophesied. "I'll bet you five thousand dollars, at even money, that there'll be rails from the Mississippi River to the Pacific in ten years. I'd make it five if the war were over now, but there's always a chance that the Confederates might drag out for a couple of years. Do you want to take the bet?"

"No. I've never bet on anything in my life—but that doesn't mean that I don't think you're wrong."

"Wise woman. Never bet against a sure thing. Ten years from now I'll remind you of it, though, because by that time you and Clem will be able to send your teams to Ogden City

and pick up shipments that were in New York less than two weeks before."

"I know what you meant, Jesse, when you said you'd always be a gambler. That's a bigger gamble than betting on the railroad."

"Not by a damn sight! A sure thing is never a gamble, and the railroad's got to come. Politics or no politics, war or peace, there are too many millions of square miles in this western country and too many thousands of people living on them. That's what I've been gambling on all along, my dear: on the land and the people, on mines and ranches and water for power and irrigation, on schools and churches and all the rest.

"I'm part of it—I could no more go back east again than the pack mule I mentioned could take a snaffle in his mouth and call himself a racehorse. Are you going to gamble with me, or are you going to let a few very necessary hangings damn the whole country and everybody in it?"

"I'll be with you, Jesse"—her defeat was now a rout, but she could not surrender abjectly—"but won't you tell me there'll be no more hangings?"

"I'll tell you this," he said slowly. "Four men left for the Gallatin valley a couple of days ago. Bill Hunter was reported from over there, and they went after him. He's the last of the bad lot, the very last name on the Committee's list. There'll be no other hangings unless—well, unless some jasper just up and asks for it!"

She laughed at his seriousness, and he went to the closet and poured a drink of brandy for himself and a glass of sherry for her. Since she had come to Alder Gulch the little drink before going to bed had become almost a ritual with them. She was almost asleep before she recalled that she had not even mentioned the name of Cap Slade to see if Jesse would comment and, in his turn, speak of Maria Virginia. That would be interesting. It would be more interesting, perhaps, if she could actually meet the famous Slade and see for herself what manner of man Maria Virginia could love so passionately.

She was to see Joe Slade but never to meet him. Several days later, as she and Jesse walked on Wallace Street, their way was blocked by a group of drunken men who applauded one of their number who was drunker than any. Jesse said, "Pardon, gentlemen," in a tone she had heard him use once or twice before: a courteous tone, and bland, but which carried like a thrown knife. The group made way, and they walked past. Ann kept her eyes squarely to the front, as a lady should under such circumstances, but it was impossible not to see the sallow, black-eyed man with the drooping mustaches who clung for support to a wooden tie-rail at the edge of the sidewalk. Broad leather belts, each supporting a revolver, slanted across his body. He was drunk, but not so drunk that he did not remove his hat as she and Jesse passed.

"Who is he?" she asked.

"Joe Slade. You've heard of him—Slade of the Overland. I wonder if he's off on a brand-new drunk or if this is still night before last's. It will be a good thing for Joe when spring comes and he can get out on the road again with his freight outfit."

They continued their walk. Ann had no wish to mention Maria Virginia, and any talk of Slade would probably lead more or less directly to that subject. Drunken men, even those as noisy as Joe Slade, were no unusual sight on Wallace Street and the short intersections which ended in the steep hillsides only a few hundred feet on either hand. In Bannack, the comparatively wide benchlands on either side of Grasshopper Creek had permitted a line of demarcation between the respectable residential area and those sections where saloons and hurdy-gurdies and gambling houses were built. Here in Alder Gulch there was no such line. The Gulch was a V-shaped knife slash from the crest of the Tobacco Roots to the Passamari Valley, and in all its length there was scarcely an acre of level ground. The creek, both in its present bed and on the bars and reefs and narrow benches which marked its course in former times, was the town's sole reason for existence. There lay the pay dirt, and every square foot was divided into mining claims. No dwellings

or business houses were erected except on land which had been tested for gold and found barren. As a result, private homes, stores, saloons, restaurants, gambling houses, and dancehalls were tumbled together for the entire length of the narrow ravine like pebbles in a furrow. A store like Paris Pfouts's or Dance & Stuart's might be sandwiched between the Paylode Saloon and the California Dancehall. The wagon train which brought Pfouts's merchandise from Great Salt Lake City or Fort Benton—the head of steamship navigation on the Missouri River—would unload dress goods and shoes on the board sidewalks side by side with the whisky barrels and cases of bottled goods consigned to Pfouts's next-door neighbor.

The saloons and gambling houses never closed, but the bartenders and the frock-coated gamblers had comparatively little to do during the daylight hours. The wives and mothers of Virginia City and Nevada could do their shopping and could stand gossiping on the sidewalks without being disturbed by drunken men. Small boys played leapfrog over the beer kegs in front of Darrow's or Number Ten or the Paylode. There was an informal truce during the hours of daylight, a truce between respectability and the brawling license of night, a truce which was broken only by such men as Bill Fairweather, Joe Slade, and their cronies.

Bill Fairweather was a privileged character. Though five men had ridden with him on the famous prospecting expedition in the spring of 1863, his fame had completely eclipsed that of his companions. His shovel had turned the first pay dirt, and he was hailed as the discoverer of the diggings which bore his name. He boasted that he had not drawn a sober breath since his claims at Discovery had begun to yield their rich store; but his excesses were tolerated, and his noisy antics regarded like those of a spoiled yet beloved child. He would gallop down the steep grade of Wallace Street, reeling in his saddle yet never losing his balance, then rein his horse to a halt and scatter a handful of dust and nuggets over some group on the sidewalk. The group might be one of Chinamen, shivering in the attenuated sunshine of the mountains; it might be made up of the town's

most dignified and respectable matrons. Bill Fairweather played no favorites. He bellowed with laughter as the Chinamen scrambled in the snow and slush for the gold he threw away, he roared equally loudly at the spectacle of some dowager's broad behind as she stooped to retrieve a nugget which had rolled beneath her skirts.

"Come an' git it! Plenty more where it came from. Every pan's runnin' a hundred dollars, gents, an' th' drinks are on Old Bill. Yipee-ay!"

The sound of the rebel yell was known on Alder Creek, and none could give it more shrilly than the red-bearded Canadian to whom Jeff Davis was the name of a gulch near Bannack, a tributary of Grasshopper Creek. His humor was Rabelaisian but inoffensive. Bill Fairweather was never sullen, never quarrelsome. He was noisy, but the noise was that of robust laughter. Long after Old Bill had died, a penniless drunkard, at Pete Daley's tavern on the Passamari, men told delightedly of the time when he had stretched out a long arm, wrapped a Chinaman's pigtail about the horn of his saddle, and dragged the shrieking Oriental for several blocks of Wallace Street; then pried the man's jaws open and stuffed his mouth with gold.

"He's a hell-raiser," they said, "but Old Bill wouldn't knowin'ly hurt a chicken. Th' Chinaman he drug thet time? Shucks, pardner, Bill might've scared him straight-eyed, but th' yellow-belly was shore well paid f'r it. Bill's always good-natured, he ain't like Cap Slade. Cap's a dif'rent kind of drunk."

Slade was different. Even the women of Alder Gulch knew that. They might sniff their disapproval of Fairweather's antics, but they would step in slushy mud to their shoetops and cross to the other side of the street rather than meet the fallow, black-eyed Slade. Drunk, Slade was as vicious as a grizzly in spring and as unpredictable. Ann saw him once or twice after that first encounter, but like the other women she turned quickly into the first doorway and avoided meeting the drunken man. Once, just at nightfall, he passed the hotel on a lathered pony which he spurred at every jump. The reins lay on the horse's neck, and Slade was yelling like a panther and firing his revolvers to

announce that he had arrived in town, that money was burning his pockets, and that another of his famous drunks was in the making.

That was the last time she saw him alive. He was hanged on March 10 by an orderly mob of nearly six hundred armed miners from the Lower Town—as the onetime Nevada had come to be known. He had been warned a score of times and fined nearly as often, but conformity with public opinion was not in him. The miners' patience was exhausted when Slade tore up a warrant for his arrest and threw the scraps of paper in Sheriff Fox's face, then drew a derringer and pressed it against Judge Davis's forehead so forcibly that the muzzle's ring was imprinted in the flesh. The guns of his drunken companions protected him during the outrage, but those guns and their owners were far away when the men from the Lower Town marched four abreast up Wallace Street and Jim Williams informed Slade that he was to be hanged immediately.

Jesse Minor had left at daylight that morning to ride to his properties in Ramshorn and Bevins gulches, and it was from Mrs. Ennis, wife of the hotel proprietor, that Ann learned of the hanging. The cockney woman was ashen.

"You cahn't go out, Mrs. Minor, you just cahn't. They're 'anging a man, ma'am. There's thousands and thousands of men just down the street, and they're a-'anging that Cap Slade down at the corral be'ind Pfouts's store. Only last night 'e was in the bar yonder—merciful 'Eaven, but this is a 'orrible country!"

Ann agreed with her and returned to her room. From the window she could see that Wallace Street, below the hotel, was filled from curb to curb by a crowd of men, but there was no shouting, nor even a hint of the throaty, animal roar that was the voice of a mob. She had heard that sound once—when Boone Helm and his companions were on their march to the gallows and certain of their friends had shouted defiance of the guards. The group which was hanging Joe Slade was silent.

She tried to read; but the lines danced before her eyes, and she threw the paper on the floor. Scarcely a month had passed

since Jesse had assured her there would be no more hangings, and yet at this moment a man was being hanged. It was impossible to focus thought upon the offenses which might have merited that fate. A man was dying, miserably and alone, as so many had died here in the mountains. Perhaps it was law—Peoples' Law, as Wilbur Sanders had rather speciously called it—but it was violent death and by any name was horrible. *Why can't they take them away—far away? They don't have to do it right here in town. I'm glad Jesse is away. He wouldn't have gone if he'd known anything like this was going to happen.*

"Mrs. Minor, Mrs. Minor!" Ennis's wife was hammering at the door with doubled fists. "Oh, for God's sake, ma'am, tell me what I'm to do."

"What's the matter now?" Ann opened the door, and the woman almost fell into the room.

"They're bringing 'im 'ere—Cap Slade. They want a room downstairs to lay 'im out in because 'is wife is coming, and they don't want 'er to find 'im 'angin. A man just came and told me so—and the mister went to the valley this morning to buy beef, and I'm all alone." Her wails were those of a child who awakens in a strange room and is terrified.

"Go down and open a room for them—that's all you can do. If you refuse, they'll probably bring him in anyway."

"I won't. There's nothing on earth could make me go down there and look on a man that's been 'anged! Oh, why did Ennis 'ave to go to the valley today of all days?" She paced up and down the room, wringing her hands.

"I'll let them in," said Ann. "You're acting disgracefully, Mrs. Ennis."

"I don't care. I don't care," the woman sniffled. Ann closed the door but before she was halfway down the stairs heard it open and saw Mrs. Ennis's face peering over the banister rail. "Tell them to use Number Three, down the hall, and just ask whoever it is that's bringing 'im 'ere who we should send the bill to. It's a 'orrible country where things like this can 'appen in a respectable 'otel."

Ann snickered involuntarily. *She's so frightened she drops*

her aitches all over the place, and wild horses couldn't drag her down these stairs; but she can still think about charging for the room. I can go down the stairs, but I couldn't ask them to pay for the room any more than I could ask questions about the hanging. And—and I guess that's the difference between us.

She waited by the desk in the little lobby. A man opened the street door and held it wide for the passage of four others who carried a plank on which was the body of Joe Slade. Ann first saw the feet, still wearing boots with big-roweled spurs which were caught over the end of the plank as though to hold the dead man more securely on the narrow litter. Slade was in his shirt sleeves—a soiled white shirt. His heavy topcoat and the coat and vest he wore beneath had been removed before—*why should they do that?* She knew why when she saw the other bearers sidestepping to avoid tripping over several feet of hard-twisted yellow rope which dragged on the floor between them. The dead man had been cut down from the gallows; none of his executioners had thought to remove the noose from about his throat. Ann fought the nausea which swept over her, but she stepped into the dining room, seized a napkin from the first table, and spread it over the purple features.

"Bring him back here," she said steadily, "and one of you take that—that rope away." She recognized two of the men. The red-faced, stocky man with the little pig eyes was X. Biedler, who would sooner hang a man than eat a good meal, according to Clem. The other, blue-eyed, calm, with a goatee a finger's-breadth wide on his lower lip, was James Williams, the rancher from Williams Creek who was executive officer of the Virginia City Committee. What awful connotations that title had. She repeated her order to Biedler. "Take that rope away. You probably put it there—so take it off."

"Get him on the bed first," Williams interrupted. "His wife's coming down the hill as fast as her hoss can run—you don't want her to find us here, do you?"

His wife! Dear God, I never even thought of her! Ann opened the first door she came to. She closed her eyes as the

savage Biedler tugged at the big knot which thrust Slade's head so grotesquely to the right.

"His boots, too!" she commanded. Something Jesse had once said came to her mind. No man who had lived as Joe Slade had lived wished to die with his boots on. He and his kind lived by the sword, or its equivalent in the form of a blue-barreled gun, but one and all cherished the desire to die peaceably and with dignity in bed. She heard one boot, then the other, clatter to the floor. She opened her eyes and saw that Biedler had completed his task and now stood with the rope in his hand. He hurled it under the bed as booted feet clattered on the uncarpeted boards of the hall and Maria Virginia Slade burst into the room. Williams deftly twitched the napkin back over the discolored face.

Maria Virginia was fury and grief mingled. She was hate and tragedy and frenzy. And she was beautiful in the rage which eclipsed her sorrow. Jim Williams—who, men said, was so nervy that he had no nerves—retreated half a pace before her. Biedler side-stepped to the wall, but she stood with her hands on the jamb on either side of the doorway and blocked escape. She was panting, but in a moment she found speech—the speech of the bars and gambling halls and the hurdy-gurdy houses of a score of towns.

"You killed him! You dirty goddamn Strangers killed the best man that ever came into this territory. You'd never have done it if I'd been here—you wouldn't have had the nerve. I know you all, too. You, X. Biedler, that's been drunk with Joe a dozen times. And you, Jim Williams. And you, and you—all of you." Her finger stabbed like a dagger as she named each man. "May you know nothing but sorrow and a slow death to follow, and then may God damn your murdering souls to hell! Oh, Joe—my Joe!"

She flung herself on the bed beside the dead man. Biedler and the other bearers tiptoed from the room, and Ann saw one black-bearded miner cross himself. Only Williams lingered for a moment, his face expressionless as he looked at the weeping woman and the dead man. Ann glanced quickly toward the

single window; but the curtains covered the glass, and little light came from the narrow alley on which the room looked. For an instant she had thought the sunlight had touched Williams's broad forehead and shaven cheeks. He beckoned to her as he turned, but did not speak until she had closed the door and left Maria Virginia with her dead.

"You're staying with her?" he asked flatly.

Ann nodded. She noticed that his eyes were a bright, very pale blue. Strange eyes that seemed to see nothing whatever except the single object on which they were fixed. Keen eyes, unwinking, unwavering.

"That's good," he said. "See that she's kept here, Mis' Minor. Don't let her git out on the street and make a fool of herself with any crazy gunplays or anything like that. She's likely to do it the state she's in now."

"Could anyone blame her?" asked Ann hotly. "She knows her husband wasn't a roadster and a murderer like those other men. He was hanged just for drunkenness!"

"You c'n ask Jesse about that," said Williams. "Joe Slade was warned dozens of times, and she knows it. Maybe she couldn't have kept him over at the ranch, but I never heard of her tryin'. Keep her in the hotel, that's all. We don't want trouble with Joe Slade's woman."

"I think you're hard on her, Mr. Williams," Ann remonstrated. "She was his wife—and she loved him."

"I said his woman." The blue eyes were as expressionless as twin bits of china. "And as for lovin' him, she'll be lovin' somebody else before the year's out—long before. Her kind always does. What I want you to know—seeing that you're Jess Minor's wife—is that the Committee didn't order for Slade r' be hanged. It was th' people. Close to six hundred men from Nevada that had their bellies full of Slade and his kind. We've got to make this country fit f'r decent people to live in, ma'am. That's all."

She stood in the shabby hallway for a long time after he left her, how long she did not know. In the room to her right, Molly Slade wept over her husband's body in a paroxysm of grief and fury which, as Ann listened, assumed a regular pattern. The

tearing sobs rose to a high-pitched scream which was cut off as suddenly as though a hand had been clapped over the woman's lips. Then followed maledictions, and curses fouler than any Ann had ever heard from teamster or packer or drunken miner. And after the curses, the dry, tearing weeping was renewed.

Ann heard those sounds only subconsciously. She was thinking of Jim Williams. She heard Jesse say, many times, that the new territory must be ruled by honest, law-abiding people, and she had listened with little emotion while Wilbur Sanders had defended the Vigilance Committee with a lawyer's skillful arguments. People's law . . . delegation of authority . . . a situation analogous to that faced by an army commander . . . ample precedent in history for voiding the right of appeal . . . words, words, words. James Williams had delivered no oration, and his words were trite—"We've got to make this country fit for decent people to live in"—but his face was a lambent flame. He was far from a romantic figure—a tired man in worn clothing and wearing a shabby, high-peaked cloth cap with flaps to protect his ears—but she knew that for a moment she had stood face to face with greatness. She was to see James Williams many times during the years that lay ahead; she was to learn that he could be mean and ignoble and—when he died a suicide—cowardly, but nothing was to eclipse her memory of that moment when she read in his eyes a zeal so holy, a purpose so intense, that it transcended emotion. *He made me feel that it was right to hang Slade and that all the rest of those men had to be hanged, too, and that it was just weakness for me to feel sorry for that poor woman in there. He's out of the Bible, a man like that—"the sword of the Lord and of Gideon!"*

6

Jesse did not return until nearly midnight. She knew that no man, least of all a member of the Committee, could ride the twisting length of Wallace Street that night without learning of the hanging of Slade, but when he kissed her twice and held

her tightly in his arms she knew that he had learned that Maria Virginia was in her charge.

"I'm proud of you tonight, Ann," he said softly. "There are plenty of women who would have been very glad to slip a knife—a figurative one—between Molly Slade's ribs. She deserved it from you, too, but you helped her instead."

"Who told you?"

"Jim Williams. He also informed me that you had leather in you."

"Is that a compliment?"

"It's the highest that Jim knows how to pay. What did you do with Molly?"

Ann pointed to the door, usually locked, which connected their room with that adjoining.

"She's in there, asleep. She was like a crazy woman, Jesse, and I finally got desperate and sent Ennis to find Dr. Rutar and tell him I had to have something to put her to sleep. The doctor came himself and gave her a powder of some kind in a glass of water, and she was asleep inside of ten minutes. He said he'd given her a dose that would knock out a horse and that she wouldn't stir until late in the morning. Did you want to see her, Jesse?"

He threw up his arm as though to ward off a blow.

"God forbid!" he said fervently. "Do you think I want to risk repeating the most embarrassing moment of my life? And if you were trying to make me squirm, Ann, you succeeded." He changed the subject swiftly. "She'll probably be willing to go back to the ranch in the morning. Tallent, the coppersmith, said he'd work all night if he had to but that Joe would be well boxed up before sunrise."

"You heard about that, too? That was awful, Jesse. Some men—friends of his—came here and offered to take charge of the body and all that. Just as soon as they said 'burial,' she just blew up. She swore—"

"She can on occasion," said Jesse reminiscently.

"Well, she did. Anyhow, she swore she'd never allow him to be buried in this country where he'd been murdered, and she

made those men promise to have a coffin made that she could keep him in until the roads opened in the spring. Then, she said, she'd take him to Great Salt Lake City and bury him there. Just listening to it nearly made me sick."

"Molly's a bit impulsive, as you may have noticed"—Jesse's eyes were dancing—"but those fellows certainly took her at her word. They got Campbell to make a coffin of white oak planks, and now they've got Tallent lining it with heavy-gauge copper. Everything's arranged—including the purchase of half a barrel of alcohol which George Sadwood just happened to have on hand. George's conscience must have bothered him when they came in asking for alcohol. He swore he had it for sale to traders who made Injun whisky out of it—an Injun doesn't think white man's liquor has any real kick; they prefer a mixture of red pepper, plug tobacco, alcohol, and water—and not too much water, thank you."

Ann knit her brows.

"I'm stupid, Jesse, but—what do they want the alcohol for?"

"To pickle Joe Slade in, of course! Joe goes in the box first, then the lid is soldered on, and then the alcohol is poured in through a hole which can be closed with a screw plug. Then the wooden lid over all. Did Molly say Salt Lake City? Hell's delight, he'll be fixed for shipment to China if she wants to send him there."

"Jesse," she expostulated. "You shouldn't make a joke of things like that."

"Don't you think it's funny? If you don't, quit trying not to laugh, my dear."

"I'm not laughing—or if I am it's because I'm as nervous as a cat after what I've gone through today."

"You haven't had much to make you laugh, I'll bet, so go ahead and roar if you want to—and if you think Doc Rutar's powder can be trusted. It was funny, Ann, that scene in Tallent's shop. The late Cap Slade was laid out, decently enough, on a cot which stood in a snowdrift just outside the door. The alcohol barrel was right beside him—if Joe had decided to resurrect he wouldn't have had to reach six inches. And—"

"Jesse! That's enough!"

"And inside," he continued imperturbably, "was the oak coffin standing on a pair of carpenter's horses while Tallent snipped his copper and fitted it and soldered all the joints. And perched on the workbench or squatting on the floor, trying to keep out of Tallent's way, were half a dozen of Joe's friends, who were—by proxy, so to speak—sitting up with him. They had their solemn moments when they recalled that they'd all aided and abetted Joe in his hell-raising and that a couple of them might well be out in the snow with him now if the boys from Nevada hadn't decided that one man was plenty to point a moral."

"Are you drunk, Jesse? I never heard you talk like this in your life—and how could you tell what they were thinking about?"

"I am sober, my dear, beastly sober. And as for knowing what those fellows were thinking about—I didn't. I could only judge by their actions. When I came through the door at least two of them tried to get out the window, which seemed to indicate guilty consciences. As I was saying, whenever they were oppressed by sad reveries of what might have been, they passed a bottle. It was circulating quite steadily while I was there. D'you know, Ann, there's something singularly fitting, to my way of thinking, about Joe Slade being preserved in alcohol. All the way up the street I tried to recall a Latin tag—Horace, I think—which should be his epitaph. It's *quisquis* something or other, but it eludes me. Ten years ago I'd have had it at my tongue's end; but ten years ago my father was hearing me recite my Latin, and when I missed a line he reminded me of it with a shingle. I wish I could think of that line—I'd like to suggest it to Molly. She'd prefer something Biblical, though—the completely irreligious always do. Her grief will probably last long enough for her to buy Joe a very expensive tombstone; an extravagance which she will regret bitterly in later and drunken moments."

"Don't be too unkind, Jesse." *That's just about the same thing James Williams said about her—no decent man respects a bad woman.* "After all, he was her husband."

"Not after all, my dear, but after a good many—and before a good many more. Don't waste your sympathies on Molly Slade. She was true to Joe, and she'll be true to the next one—but you can bet every dollar in your pocket that there will be a next one. She'll never dedicate her life to a memory, not Molly. Tomorrow is what she's interested in, not yesterday or last week. I wonder . . ."

His voice trailed off. She waited a moment, then asked: "What do you wonder, Jesse?"

"I was wondering if Molly would like an epitaph such as '*requiescat in aeternum in vinum ubi est.*'"

"What on earth does that mean?"

"Something like 'may he rest forever in the wine where he now is.' To call Sadwood's alcohol 'wine' is to pay an undeserved compliment, but I don't believe the Latin tongue has words for Injun likker—you're laughing again, dear one, in spite of yourself. Laugh some more, Ann; God knows there's been little to laugh at these last few months."

He was chuckling, but his eyes were suspiciously bright. Ann threw her arms about him.

"Oh, Jesse, you've made me forget this whole awful day. We can play together, can't we? We can laugh and be silly and just once in a while forget that we're grown up—"

"And respectable," he supplied. "Ann, there's nothing to stop us from playing hop-frog in the middle of Wallace Street. We can play mumblety-peg on the dining-room table. We can sit on a butte and howl at the moon like coyotes. We can do anything, you and I. We can ride and shoot and swim—do you know how to swim, Ann?"

"No. A girl can't—"

Of course you can. Before the year's out I'll have you diving naked into a pool and scaring the trout to death."

"Jesse! That's positively indecent!"

"Is it? I hadn't thought of that. It's fun, though, especially when the water isn't too cold. Just wait and see for yourself."

Neither Slade's widow nor his friends were given any opportunity to parade their grief or to turn a funeral into a public demonstration against the Alder Gulch Committee. The body—and it had been preserved exactly as Jesse had described—was taken in charge by Committee representatives as soon as the coppersmith had completed his task. The coffin was placed in a wagon and before dawn was on its way to the house which Slade had built on the Madison slope, seven miles from Virginia City. The dead man's friends—and he had many—were told that the widow had specifically requested that the body be removed as promptly as possible; Maria Virginia was informed that Joe's friends had taken him home, thinking that she would so desire.

"I'll take the blame if there is any," said Jesse Minor. "You were sound asleep, Molly, and I told them it was all right and that we'd bring you over as soon as you'd had some breakfast."

Ten hours of drugged sleep had tamed Maria Virginia. She was still tearful; she still maintained that Joe had been murdered; but some of her frenzy had abated, and her curses, while venomous, were less threatening. She had become aware of convention, too, for she agreed without argument when Ann told her that it would be the height of impropriety for a widow to appear in public unveiled and wearing boots and a mud-stained riding habit. Jesse had ready a covered buckboard, and Maria Virginia climbed quickly into the rear seat with Ann. They had covered nearly a mile before Jesse thought to mention that the horse which she had ridden the day before had been taken to a livery stable in Junction but that a man would be sent over with it the next day.

"I don't want him," she said sulkily. "He's a good horse, and he's fast; but he wasn't fast enough to get me to Virginia in time to stop those damned Strangers. I don't care if I never see him again."

Jesse did not answer. His private opinion was that no horse ever foaled could have borne her to Alder Gulch before the

noose tightened about Joe Slade's throat. The leaders of the Nevada force had been advised that a messenger had speeded toward the ranch with news of Slade's impending fate, and they had hurried with their task.

"I'll give him to you," said Molly suddenly to Ann. "You're the first decent woman that ever treated me as though I wasn't dirt under her feet, and I want to do something for you. I'll give you that Jupe horse."

"Oh, I couldn't let you," Ann protested. "Besides, I've already got a horse. She's in Bannack now, but—"

"You haven't got a horse like my Jupe—there's nothing west of the mountains to match him. He's faster than a deer and can jump like one, and he's got a mouth softer than a kid glove. Just ride him once, and you'll see."

"Where did he come from, Molly?" Jesse asked.

"God knows—except that he's not one of these mountain-bred cayuses. Joe bought him for me from one of the officers at Fort Douglas that was going back to the war. He'd never tell me what he paid, but it was plenty." She paused to sniffle. "I'll be getting out of this damned country now, and I don't want to be bothered with any stock. I'll sell the freight outfit over at Ravenwood, too. I'm going to give you that Jupe horse, Ann, whether you want him or not. I'll write a bill of sale when we get to the ranch."

During his short career as a freighter to the Alder Gulch towns Slade had established two ranches. One, in the Madison Valley, he called Ravenwood, and there he kept his wagons and his stock. The second, a ranch only by courtesy, was five miles nearer to Virginia City and its saloons, and there Slade lived. It was a two-room stone dwelling with a frame ell in which slept the Indian woman who acted as housekeeper and cook or in any other capacity ordered by her capricious master and mistress. Jimmy, a halfbreed boy whom Slade was supposed to have adopted, slept in the small barn, in the main room of the dwelling, or carried his buffalo robe and blankets to the high-gabled loft above the bedroom. He was a silent child with the hawk nose and the ruthless hawk eyes of the Plains tribes. Slade's

interest in the boy was considered entirely paternal and was therefore commended. Few men of that period and region displayed any solicitude for the halfbreed brats they might have casually sired. Jimmy appeared and took the near horse's bridle when Jesse checked the team in front of the house. The woman stood in the doorway, watching Maria Virginia from expressionless black eyes. Neither of the Indians displayed the slightest emotion, although Slade's body had arrived only a few hours before and had been stored in a lean-to attached to the barn.

Ann knew that Jesse was restless—any man would be under such circumstances, she told herself with a grim little smile—but it seemed impossible to hasten their departure. She could not leave while Maria Virginia was weeping passionately on the coffin, nor could she refuse to wait while the widow changed her clothes and drew up a formal bill of sale for the horse which she insisted that Ann accept.

"You've got to have it, Mrs. Minor—I mean Ann. I'll give you the bill of sale which Joe got with the stud, too. Then you'll be in the clear and can tell any of the Stranglers where they can go if they say maybe you stole him. There'll be plenty that'll do anything to get him, once they see him run."

Changing to clothes more appropriate to the widowhood of which she was now aware took time. More time was consumed while she ransacked the many pigeonholes of a homemade desk for the document which established Slade's title to the horse. Then Jesse must be called in to suggest the proper wording of the bill of sale. "Just copy the other one," he said irritably, "only with Ann's name, Ann C. Minor. And then—" He broke off suddenly, and Ann saw that he was intent on some object which rested on the hewn plank above the stone fireplace. "And then sign it," he added with an effort. He said nothing until the woman had finished her writing and then, elaborately casual, lifted from the mantel the object which had attracted his attention.

"Where did this thing come from, Molly?"

Maria Virginia wrinkled her brows. The object was a crescent some five inches from point to point and made of a bright bluish-green metal. Small holes had been drilled in either point, and a larger one was in the middle of the lune.

"I don't know—yes I do, too. I remember now. Poor Joe got it last summer from an Injun 'way up toward the head of Hell Gate River, south of Deer Lodge. He said it was copper."

"It's copper ore—there's a difference."

"Is there? Joe thought at first he really had something, but a fellow at Fort Benton tested it for him and said that it was just something an Injun had pounded out of an old chunk of copper. Take it along if you want it, Jess—it's no use to me."

Jesse said, "Thanks," and stuck the crescent point down in his coat pocket. Years were to pass before that piece of virgin ore was to be more than a tantalizing reminder to him and to a bandy-legged little Irishman named Clark who had worked a claim in Jeff Davis Gulch near Bannack. There was to be a rush to new placer bars near Big Butte—swiftly abbreviated to Butte—and that camp was to take a new lease on life when rich quartz leads were found in the surrounding hills. Those who staked those quartz claims were to skyrocket to wealth when the gold became merely a by-product to the richest copper deposits ever discovered. By that time Maria Virginia Slade had disappeared. Jesse spent more than a thousand dollars in a vain attempt to locate her and reward her for the clue which—however indirectly—had led to Anaconda Copper. She had vanished completely after deserting James Kiskadden, whom she had married in Virginia City a year, almost to the day, after Joe Slade had been hanged there. Kiskadden had obtained a divorce in Salt Lake City, had remarried, and knew nothing of where his former wife might be and cared considerably less. Long after the search had been called off, one of the detectives employed by Jesse, while working on another case, learned that a nameless prostitute had died in a Chicago charity ward and had been buried in Potter's Field. In her delirium she had several times shouted defiance of the "God-damned Strangers."

The horse was all that Maria Virginia had claimed, a clean-limbed, beautiful bay stallion who could run like the white-rumped antelopes. He had been the especial charge of the Indian boy, Jimmy, and his coat glowed like polished copper except for the area covered by the scar of a huge and unreadable brand on the left flank.

"Looks like some Indian brand," Jesse remarked, "or it might be Mexican. Indians and Mexicans are both branding their ponies now that the white man has shown 'em it's the only way to keep track of 'em. Horses get around in this country just as much as men do, and that officer might have picked him up in New Mexico. I've seen some of those big spraddling brands down there."

The comment dismissed the suspicion forming in Ann's mind that she had somewhere seen the horse before. As soon as Jesse had seen the bay stallion run he realized that the beast offered a temptation so great that thieves might even forget that the rider was the wife of a member of the dreaded Executive Committee. He had a harness maker stitch a holster on the saddle cantle where Ann's right hand would naturally fall, and he placed one of his beloved ivory-handled Colt revolvers in the holster.

"I can spare it," he said. "You know, Ann, this country's getting so civilized lately that there's no excuse for a man packing more than one gun."

"But, Jesse, I've never shot anything in my life except a light rifle that a cousin of mine had. I don't know how to shoot a revolver."

"You know how to point your finger, don't you? Here, take the gun in your hand—you don't have to squeeze it so hard, Ann, there's no juice in it—and point it at that stump yonder just as though you were pointing your finger. Do it again. Now, again. Now try pulling the hammer back with your thumb and letting go of it as you point. The gun will do the rest."

"Where's the trigger, Jesse?"

"There isn't any. Just turn her loose and let her snort."

Ann obeyed. The .44 bellowed, and she squealed; but the stump was less than twenty feet away, and the bullet knocked a sizable bark chip from the side.

"Plenty good enough," Jesse observed, "seeing that all you really need on that stud is a spur. Jab him once, and there's nothing north of Snake River that could even come near you. You've got to make me one promise, though."

"What is it?"

"Well, it's not likely to happen, but if anybody ever tries to block you, or makes a grab for your bridle, you're to pull that gun and shoot. Don't ask questions; don't say, 'Stand back, sir, or you'll get hurt,' or any other damn-fool remarks. And don't try to wing him or scare him. Do your best to kill him. Promise?"

"I promise."

"Good—but what on earth are you laughing at?"

"I remembered something. What you said to that woman at Sheep Rock. You told her just how to—to cut her husband's throat if he beat her, and you had exactly the same look on your face that you had just now."

"I always look serious when I give good advice—I wonder if she took it."

In their room at the hotel, while Ann dressed for dinner, he picked up that conversation at the point where he had left off.

"That fake emigrant at Sheep Rock called himself Fitzjohn," he said. "He was a crooked gambler, and his wife was a trollop; but it seems to me you didn't exactly approve of the way I treated her."

"It's not kind to bring that up. You know I didn't understand, and you certainly didn't try to explain. I—"

"You were the one who brought it up. This afternoon. That wasn't much over a year ago, that business at Sheep Rock; it'll be two years next August. Lots can happen in that time, can't it, Ann? Maybe we're both a little older and have better sense."

She crossed the room swiftly and kissed him. The dam which obstinate pride had reared between them had been swept away

completely on the night when Henry Plummer had died, but neither she nor Jesse had ever traced the stream fearlessly back toward its source. He held her face between his palms, and she pursed her lips expectantly; but he looked steadily into her eyes and did not return her kiss.

"What do you see?" she asked.

"I was looking for a girl I knew in Salt Lake City," he said lightly. "I told her—I wonder if she remembers—that she could be beaten with rods and never cry out. She's still there, but she's a woman now."

"Are you sorry?"

"You know. You've taken your beatings, and you've never cried. I love you a lot, Ann."

It was the nearest he had ever come to apologizing for Maria Virginia, for the red-bearded Fitzjohn, or for the long months during which she had matched his cold courtesy with her own. Nor would he apologize, ever, for those things or any others. She knew that now. Maria Virginia; Fitzjohn; the man he had killed in Salt Lake City and the man he had been ready to kill before her eyes in Ogden; Henry Plummer, whom he had called friend and whom he had helped to hang; Boone Helm—all were merely incidents to him, incidents which might conceivably be repeated in the restless life of the frontier. He could never be humble, this man she had married, nor could he ever be petty or vindictive. He could kill, but he could not lie. How little she had known him on that morning in the camp at Sheep Rock when she had challenged him! He had accepted that challenge without a word. She had drawn the line between them, but the price she had set for crossing was too high. He had stepped back and waited for her to cross that line, arrogantly confident that some day she would cross. And she had! She had crossed it on that bitter night in Bannack when she knew that she loved him and his pride and his arrogance and his confidence that was so great as to transcend conceit. She had clung to him and begged him to kiss her. It would always be like that. If waiting were necessary he would wait and she would come to him, but he would never flaunt his victories. He would only smile, ten-

derly, as he was smiling now. He would always win, but the price of triumph would be that he would never know the ecstasy of surrender. Even now . . .

"You're shaking, Ann. Are you cold?"

"Maybe I'm excited." *Oh, Jesse, you fool! Can't you tell!* "Why shouldn't I be? That's the first time—the very first time, I do believe, that you ever really told me you loved me!"

"Do I have to tell you so?" He kissed her, laughing, and she knew the moment was past. *All men are fools, I guess. I wonder if this is what Molly meant when she said I could understand.*

"Of course you do, often. That's one thing a woman never gets tired of hearing."

"I'll remember."

He released her, and she returned to the improvised dressing table and the task of arranging her heavy hair. He picked up the New York paper, which he read and reread before passing it on to others.

"Damn if I can see how the war can last much longer. Burchette and some of those red-hot rebels still talk about winning; but the Confeds have been fighting on their own soil for nearly three years now, and they must be bled pretty near white.

"Another thing, Ann—changing the subject. I'd feel a lot better if you didn't ride alone until you were used to that stud and any little tricks he might have. He's a lot more horse than that fat mare of yours. Suppose I get a horse tomorrow, and we'll ride to Highland and take a close look at that knoll I showed you. That's where we'll put our house just as soon as the frost is out of the ground."

Fool . . . fool . . . fool. Yes, I'm thinking of you, Jesse Minor!

She rode the bay stallion almost every day. The weather was still cold, but there was a whispered promise of spring in the air as March drew to a close, the swift spring that rode over the ranges on the Chinook wind and burst overnight the icy bonds that winter had laid on the creeks. She rode with Jesse to his claims in Ramshorn and Bevins gulches, where the miners, idle

for months, were puttering happily on their sluiceboxes and Long Toms in preparation for the day when water would flow through them again. They rode several times to the knoll which Jesse had bought as a building site. The ground was as hard as flint, and they could drive no stakes; but they stripped branches from the sagebrush and thrust them in the snow to mark where the house would stand—facing the south and the sun—and how the ground floor would be divided.

Clem Talbot had left with the teams for Salt Lake City a few days after his return from the scout to Hell Gate. "I'm all right, Miss Ann; what're ye worryin' about? A change 'll de me good, an' if them damn Mormon traders c'n come through with a team I know I wont have no trouble." He had been gone for nearly six weeks, and when she heard that the coach from Bannack had passed his returning train on the Passamari she rode north to meet him.

The change had done him good; that was apparent at first sight. He was on the box of the lead wagon, a buffalo robe across his knees, a wad of fine cut in his cheek,—and—to judge from appearances—peace in his soul.

"Take a look at them bulls, Miss Ann! They ain't lost ten pounds apiece in a thousand mile. If they'd been mules now . . ." He spat his opinion over the wheel.

"They look fine, Clem, but you know I didn't ride ten miles to tell you that you were a born bullwhacker. I came to show off my new horse, and you haven't even noticed him."

"I seen him, all right." Clem was unimpressed. "I wasn't goin' t' mention it, but since you bring it up—how long has thet jay-bird been in town, ma'am, an' how come ye t' be ridin' his hoss?"

"What on earth are you talking about, Clem?"

"You ain't—" He looked her squarely in the face, saw that she was quite sincere, and belched loudly to cover his confusion. "I apologize, Miss Ann. A woman can't be expected t' have a real eye f'r a hoss, an' he's some changed at that. His mane's been roached, an' he's some heavier, an' he's wearin' that hawg-pen brand on his flank—an' mebbe when you seen him last you was lookin' more at th' rider than you was at th' hoss.

"I knew him th' minute I set eyes on him. I ain't never f'got a hoss I liked 'r a man I didn't. He used t' belong t' that young squirt that was shinin' up t' every pretty girl in th' train when we was follerin' th' Platte road. Crittenden his name was—Jeff Crittenden."

Chapter XIX

I

THE TERRITORY OF MONTANA was created by an act of Congress passed on May 28, 1864. The news was telegraphed to Great Salt Lake City, then rushed by mounted messenger to Bannack and to Alder Gulch. Judge Sidney Edgerton was appointed governor—which surprised no one, Edgerton least of all—and Bannack was designated the territorial capital. The town on Grasshopper Creek was nearly a year older than the Alder Gulch settlements and presumably deserved the honor, but her citizens' exuberance was alloyed by the lively fear that the crown was a temporary one. Mining camps boomed or died, there was no middle course, and Bannack knew that only the discovery of new and very rich placers would stimulate her to new growth and halt the steady withdrawal of her population to the more thriving towns in the Tobacco Roots. Bannack, at the best, was static; Virginia City, in this second summer of her existence, was booming as the towns of the Mother Lode in California had boomed a dozen years before. "In another year," her citizens shouted, "Bannack won't be more'n a wide spot in the road."

There was but one town now from the mouth of the gulch almost to the headquarters of Alder Creek. Junction, Nevada, and Central had disappeared even from the speech of those who had seen their creation. Summit, perched almost on the summit of the Divide, had thus far escaped absorption, but even Highland, where Jesse Minor was building his new home, was considered part of Virginia City.

By August of 1864 there was space for no more houses in the

bed of Alder Gulch. Newcomers were arriving daily, and Wallace Street was jammed with mule teams and heavy bull wagons and hurrying, swearing men. It was as exciting, thought Ann, and very like St. Joseph as she remembered the town on the Missouri frontier two years before—*has it been only two years?*—when the California and Oregon caravans waited for the word that the new grass had begun to tint the brown prairies along the Platte. Here were the same anxious-eyed people, the same men hurrying in and out of stores and saloons, the same slatternly, shrill-voiced women shrieking at adventurous children who raced about the heels of nervous mules. A legless man had begged on the streets of St. Joe; here there was a blind Negro who played a fiddle remarkably well and who, it was said, was rapidly becoming rich. Here, as in St. Joe, were dirty Indians in ragged blankets; here were miner and hunter, packer and freighter, gambler and prostitute. In St. Joe there had been a wandering evangelist who promised eternal hellfire for those who set out for a land so godless as California; it might be the same man who now preached from a low platform set on the sidewalk in front of Pfouts's store. Someone in the small crowd must have asked him a question, but only the reply reached Ann's ears.

"No, my friend, I am not selling anything. I am here to give something away—the love of Jesus Christ and His promise of salvation to all who accept Him. It is written here"—he tapped a book which was in his hand—"I would exhort you, beloved brethren, that ye remember that every good gift cometh of Christ."

Ann checked the bay stallion and reined him into the narrow space between two ox wagons almost directly across the street. The man's back was toward her, and she could not see his face; but his voice—she had heard that voice, as resonant as the plucked string of a cello, before.

"I bring you the gift of Truth," he went on, "and the gift of the Last Dispensation to mankind. I am a missionary of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. I am a Mormon elder, a priest of the Order of Melchisedek, and—"

Thomas Medbridge! Ann clapped her hand over her mouth, so nearly had she come to shouting the name aloud. Thomas Medbridge, who had prayed over her father in the camps between the Little Sandy and Great Salt Lake City; who had stood beside her wagon in the emigrant camp and asked her to marry him; then had ridden off to visit the mother he had not seen for ten years, the mother who had, for her soul's sake, become a plural wife.

The crowd, hungry for any novelty, overflowed into the street, and Medbridge turned so as to face the larger portion of his audience. He had changed little, Ann decided. His beard was heavier and darker, that was all, and he had trimmed it to a square shape. His eyes—she wished that she could see his eyes more closely, but when he looked in her direction she bent her head quickly so that her hatbrim shadowed her face.

"You are rich, you men of Virginia City, but your wealth is not of the spirit. I come here to tell you that the fullness of time is at hand. . . ." Ann paid little heed to his words. He preached, with simple eloquence, an evangelism which, so far, differed little from the pulpit thunderings of Baptist, Methodist, or Campbellite. She saw two women, new arrivals in the Gulch, step down from a wagon seat and move closer to the preacher. Medbridge's voice dropped to a lower, more vibrant pitch. He had an audience, if only the two women and half a dozen men who had stood firm while the crowd about them paused, listened, and moved on. As the sermon progressed the group which stood firm increased in number, giving ear to the man who told them that Christ was coming, coming in glory, and that only those of His own Church might hope to stand in His train. The words were less moving than their delivery. Ann recalled how her own soul's burdens had been lightened when this man laid his hands on her head and humbly asked God to bless her, his sister; now she was seeing those same fine hands laid figuratively upon the heads of many. In that day, men and women were sharply aware of their souls, of the imminence of death, and of the terrors which awaited the unredeemed. God was near, a stern and terrible God into whose heaven no sinner could

enter. Slowly—for none of his hearers would savor a dish which was hastily thrust before them—Medbridge told of a hereafter where every man was priest and king, of a message translated from mystical characters on golden plates, a message which he had been commanded to carry to "all nations, kindreds, tongues, and peoples" to assure them of glorious resurrection in the millennium which was at hand, of Christ crucified and of Joseph Smith martyred.

He's so sincere, she thought suddenly. He loves these people and is really trying to save their souls. They know it, too, and that's why they're listening to him. They know he's kind and generous and forgiving. . . .

"... But we have all sinned, and it is written that none who has not repented his sins can share in the Last Dispensation. 'Put away the evil of your doings,' and you can be saved, my brothers and sisters—saved by baptism in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost!"

A voice shouted, "Amen," and he paused for a moment, his hands outstretched in benediction. At that moment, as though he had waited for the proselytizer to reach a period, the bull-like figure of John X. Biedler shouldered through the crowd.

"You got some tall savin' to do right now, Mormonite!" he shouted. "That feller that came here with you is due to be hanged in jest about five minutes!"

He laughed as the color slowly drained from Medbridge's face. He was slightly drunk and stood with booted feet wide-spread to steady himself on the uneven boards. His straggling mustache was stained with tobacco juice, and a brown trickle escaped over his thick lower lip as he grinned at the missionary.

"What's the matter, Brigham Young? You were talkin' slick enough a minute ago."

"I can't believe you," said Medbridge slowly. "You're either mocking me—as we Latter Day Saints have been mocked many times—or you've made a great mistake. My friend—"

"It was yore friend that made the mistake." Biedler was enjoying himself hugely. "He made the mistake of liftin' a poke of gold dust out of Thad Kelly's pocket and putting it in his own

—right at the Payloide Bar not ten minutes ago. Mebbe you'd like t' see for yourself." He turned and shouted to a man who stood in front of a saloon some distance down the street. "Tell 'em t' bring him up here."

The man relayed the order, and some twenty others piled out through the swinging doors and marched toward the improvised pulpit, thrusting from the sidewalk those who blocked their way. In their midst were two men, who dragged a third between them. The crowd in the street, all of whom had heard Biedler's statement, jostled one another to see the accused man. A miner climbed to the hub of a wagon and from that vantage point shouted, "String him up!" Others took up the shout, and someone loosened a coil of manila rope from a saddlehorn and tossed it over the heads of the crowd.

"Take it easy, fellers. We got all day," Biedler growled. The rope had struck him on the shoulder. "No man's been hanged here yet without a fair trial. Charley Brown's gone to fetch Jim Williams an' any other Committee member he can find. This jasper'll get his trial same as any other thief; but it'll be an almighty short one, and then . . ." He waved the coiled rope above his head. There were shouts of "that's talkin'!"

Ann recognized the guards—Charles Beehrer, a big German who had come to Alder Gulch on the heels of the first rush and promptly built a brewery, and Elkanah Morse. She was unable to see the accused man until he had been dragged close to where Medbridge stood. There Beehrer seized him roughly by the chin and tipped back his head.

Ann clutched at the curved pommel in which her right knee rested. In all the crowd she could see only that anguished, terrified face—the face of Jeff Crittenden, who had said good-by to her on the Little Sandy two years before. "*You're not seeing the last of me . . . I came west to make money, Ann, and I'm going to do it.*" Jeff Crittenden, who once had owned the bay stallion which she now rode. And he was here, in Virginia City in the Territory of Montana, and the grave young elder, Thomas Medbridge, was here too. It was real; she knew it was real. No nightmare could produce a situation so fantastic as Jefferson

Crittenden's being dragged to the gallows before her eyes and the eyes of Thomas Medbridge, who had just held out to these people the promise of Christ's love and forgiveness.

Her vision cleared, and she saw other faces. Biedler's alone was leering and cruel. The faces of Elkanah Morse and of Charley the Brewer were stern and impassive. She could see no cruelty there, none of Biedler's lust to kill, but neither could she see any hint of sympathy. The miners were openly hostile and impatient of delay. They would tolerate a killer, but a thief was hated and despised. *Jeff hasn't got one single friend except Elder Medbridge and me—and I'm a woman and he's a Mormon. What can either of us do? Oh, God, another hanging so soon!*

Medbridge and Biedler exchanged some words which she could not hear. The men who stood nearest the platform laughed at Biedler's retort, and the missionary turned on them angrily.

"Silence!" He had regained his control at the sound of that mocking laughter. He had faced jeering crowds many times and knew that weakness and temporizing spelled defeat. His voice snapped like a whiplash.

"You have called this man a Mormon thief," he said quietly. "I tell you that he is not a member of my Church; he is not a Mormon. He is my friend, and he travels with me to care for my horses and to be of other assistance. I want to hear what he has to say for himself."

"That's fair enough, X. Let the feller speak up." The voice came from somewhere in the crowd, and Biedler prodded Crittenden in the ribs.

"You heard 'em," he said. "Speak up."

"It's all a mistake," Crittenden stammered. "A man—I don't see him here now—dropped a bag of dust, and I picked it up to give it back to him. The next thing I knew everybody was jumping on me for stealing the gold. It's a big mistake."

No, thought Ann bitterly, it was not a mistake. He had taken the gold, and now he was lying, lying desperately; and Medbridge knew it. Disbelief was stamped on his face. Jeff Crittenden was a thief, a common thief.

"That's his story," said Biedler. He faced Medbridge, but his words were addressed to the close-packed throng of men. "Here's somebody can tell a different one. Sam Holtz. Come here, Sam, and tell what you seen."

The ranks made way for a broad-shouldered miner from Ramshorn. His hat was a nondescript rag, his coat was in tatters, and his trousers were caked to the thigh with yellow mud.

"I was settin' at one of the tables," he said deliberately, "and I seen this feller here dip his hand into Kelly's side pocket—smooth as grease and quicker'n you c'd say scat—an' come out with a poke of dust. He slipped it in his own pocket an' started for the door, leavin' half a glass of beer on th' bar. So I grabbed him. We found th' poke in his pocket. It had Kelly's initials on it in porkypine quills."

The crowd believed him and loudly affirmed that belief with shouts of, "That's enough," and, "String him up!" Biedler's small eyes were dancing beneath his heavy brows. Neither Williams nor any other member of the Executive Committee had arrived, and the situation was still his to command. He began ostentatiously to reeve a hangman's knot in the rope which had been tossed to him.

"If you got anything more t' say, young feller," he snarled, "y'd best say it quick."

"I'll confess," Crittenden screamed desperately. "I took it. I couldn't help it. It was more money than I'd seen since—since I was robbed in Salt Lake." His head turned from side to side; his eyes swept from one face to another in the crowd seeking for some sign of understanding, of sympathy, or of a willingness to hear him. "My God, men, can't you see how it was? I've had nothing except hard luck since I came out here. I had the fastest racehorse that ever struck the Platte, and he was stolen from me on Sublette's Cutoff. And then in Salt Lake I was robbed of every cent I had in the world. He knows I was." Morse's grip on his wrist could not prevent him from raising his hand and pointing toward Medbridge. "Let me go, men. I've done nothing to be hanged for. Oh, for Christ's sake—"

"Shud up!" Charles Beehrer laid a heavy hand over Critten-

den's lips. "Und you, too, X," he added. "Let's get der straidt of dis. I want to hear what the predicant—der preacher, I mean—says. Iss it true, mister? Wass this young feller robbed in Gread Salt Lake?"

Ann's heart leaped. Beehrer was a Vigilante, but she sensed a difference between him and the savage Biedler. He could recognize degrees of guilt and in spite of Crittenden's confession would weigh all evidence in his favor before passing judgment. Jeff's life or death might depend on the Mormon's words, and her eyes turned to the tall figure which towered above the crowd. He was bare-headed, and his long hair and dark beard were ruffled by the light breeze. The added height of the platform lifted him above the crowd and made him seem remote and somehow portentous. It was as though he were no longer Thomas Medbridge but one of the prophets of whom he had spoken. He was Melchisedek, high priest of righteousness.

"You have called on me for truth," he said slowly, "and truth you shall receive. This man is not of my church—the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints does not protect the liar or offer refuge to the thief. I call all of you to witness that. The Church will forgive sin, but he who sins must atone . . ."

He's not helping Jeff. He doesn't want to help him. He doesn't, if they hang him or not.

". . . And he has said that he was robbed in our city. I will tell you that I—an elder of the Church—caught him in the act of holding up a man. He said the man was a gambler, who had robbed him by trickery, and that he was trying only to recover his own money. I believed him, and I let him go his way. The next day he was arrested and charged by that same man with robbery. Neither man was of our faith; but the jury found this Crittenden guilty, and he was sentenced to prison. He was released only a short time ago, and I—thinking that he had atoned for his sin—gave him employment."

"So dis is not d' first time," Beehrer interrupted. "Even the Mormons do not like a t'ief. I guess dot settles t'ings, X, but besser we wait for Jim Williams or Pfouts."

"What do we need them for?" Biedler dropped the loop he

had made in the rope over Crittenden's head. As though the twisted strands had been of hot iron, searing his flesh, Jeff screamed, "No! No!"

Ann gathered the reins and touched the stallion's flank—ever so lightly—with her spurred heel. The big horse snorted and tossed his head, and the crowd made way before horse and rider like water parting before the prow of a ship.

"And I say no!" Ann shouted clearly.

Every man in the crowd turned as though a master lever had been thrown to set in operation hundreds of pivots. Medbridge stood motionless on his platform, fists clenched. The stallion passed so close that she could have touched the Mormon with her hand. She heard him whisper her name, but she did not turn her head. He was no longer a priestly judge from the Old Testament, only a rather despicable man. Crittenden, too, recognized her. She saw recognition leap into his eyes, saw his lips part—and then he lowered his head on his breast and would look her in the eyes no longer. As she cleared her skirt from the cantle, her fingers touched the smooth butt of the revolver which Jesse had insisted she should carry. She slipped it quickly from the holster and, as she slid to the ground, concealed both hand and gun in the folds of her habit. Biedler stood squarely in front of Crittenden and his two guards.

"You'd best get back on your horse, Mis' Minor," he said harshly. "This here ain't a woman's business."

"It's about time the women made it their business, then," she retorted. "All you men think of now is hanging somebody. You've gone crazy, blood-crazy, like a pack of sheep-killing dogs!"

Beehrer and Morse shuffled restlessly, but Biedler did not move. She had seen him many times but had never been so close to him as to notice—as she did now—that his eyes were flecked with red.

"You'd best go, Mis' Minor," he repeated. "We don't want no trouble—"

"Hang that man, and you'll get more trouble than you ever dreamed of!" she cried. "To hang a man just for theft is plain

savagery. We're living in a territory now, and if you hang that man I'll go—so help me God, I'll go straight to Governor Edgerton at Bannack and see that you're tried for murder, X. Biedler!"

Her face was white with the bloodless pallor of cold anger, and her eyes were the steely gray of a knife blade. The thumb of her right hand crooked over the hammer of the cut-down .44, then slowly relaxed. *No, not yet—nor ever unless Biedler himself should make a motion to draw the revolver which hung on his hip. He was scarcely likely to do that, but if he did . . .*

"There's a Miners' Court right here now," her adversary declared. "I'll leave it up to them." He stepped from in front of her and spoke to the men who crowded about them. "You've heard everything, men. What do—"

"No!" she cried again. "There'll be no voting on it, just as there'll be no more hangings for such things as drunkenness"—she heard low murmurs behind her—"or petty theft. This man has done nothing to deserve hanging. If he's a thief he should be turned over to Sheriff Fox and be given a fair trial by jury."

She glanced over Biedler's head—she was three full inches taller than the stocky Vigilante—and saw James Williams standing at the edge of the crowd, his back against the wall of Pfouts's store. His pale eyes, as brilliant as diamonds, stared steadily into hers, and again she got the odd impression that she alone was within the range of his vision. She waited for him to nod or to come forward, but he did neither. She waited tensely for Biedler to speak, but the moment of silence was broken by the heavy voice of the German brewer, Charles Beehrer.

"Shtealing iss badt," he said slowly, "but hanging iss badt, too. I know; I have seen many men die on the rope, und it iss badt efen when they deserve hanging. Dhis feller iss a t'ief; but he was caught in his shtealing, and nobody iss the worse for it. *Aber*, we do not want men like him here. I say"—he paused a moment, then continued still more slowly—"I say dot he be gifen a goot vipping, vun dot he vill not forget, und den he be gifen half an hour to get oudt of Alder Gulch. If he effer shows his face here again, we hang him!"

There were quick shouts of approval of this compromise, scattered shouts at first, more clamorous as Beehrer's suggestion was relayed from man to man.

"That's fair enough."

"Give him twenty, well tucked on."

"Fifty!"

"Twenty's enough if they're the right kind."

Ann's eyes again sought those of James Williams. She read approval in their blue depths, approval of what she had done and an order—as plain as though he had shouted the words—to get out now that her work was finished. A miner was holding the bay stallion for her in the middle of the street. He gave her the reins and then locked his fingers so that she could have a step to the saddle. He and others saw her return the revolver to its holster. Before an hour had passed everyone in Alder Gulch would know that Ann Minor had been ready to shoot X. Biedler if she had to, in order to prevent another hanging. As she reined the stallion about, she saw Crittenden's face for the last time. He was pale, and his lower lip was caught between his teeth. Biedler had already stripped him to the waist.

She slapped the long reins against the stallion's flank and trotted swiftly up the steep grade toward the hotel. Jesse would look there for her first. He would hold her in his arms and tell her that she had done well, and then everything would be all right. She tied the bay to the rail and hurried across the sidewalk. Thomas Medbridge stood in the tiny lobby, waiting for her. She wanted to bow very coldly and distantly and thus show him how unpardonable she considered his betrayal of Crittenden, but she could not do it. He came toward her, and she took the hand he extended.

"Miss Car—Mrs. Minor, I mean—or may I still call you Ann?"

She tried afterward to remember her reply but could recall only that she had given him her hand and that they had remained standing at the foot of the stairs.

"I thought that a vision had been given me," he said gently. "A voice spoke, and I raised my eyes and beheld—you! You

were magnificent, Ann. You saved the life of that poor, miserable thief."

He's praising me, she thought, and he could have saved Jeff himself except for his talk about atoning for sins. Can't he see that? And he thinks he did right.

"I looked for you when I came back from Manti," Medbridge went on, "but the California train had gone, and I thought you had gone with it. It was not until several weeks later that I happened to see, in a back number of the *Deseret News*, a small notice which told of your marriage. And now I find you here!"

"Yes," she said. "We came to Bannack first, my husband and I, and we moved here last January."

"And you are happy, Ann—may I ask you that?"

"I think that I am the happiest woman in the world," she said simply. *And I am. Why shouldn't I say so?*

"I am glad for your sake. I"—and the words seemed to pour from his lips—"I am married too, Ann. I am living my religion now. I married Sister Easton, who came from England in my company—and I took a second wife. Each of them has borne me a child."



She wanted Jesse—but she could not wait for him at the hotel and under the same roof with Thomas Medbridge, who spoke so proudly of living his religion and who offered her tracts which, he said sonorously, would prove that Mormon polygamy was not lustfulness but was indeed a celestial order which honored men and women alike by their participation therein.

She untied the stallion and mounted from the wooden carriage block which Ennis had built at the edge of the sidewalk. She rode swiftly to Highland, where the log walls of their new home were rising, but was told by the workmen there that Jesse had left for Virginia City more than an hour before. She rode on—not back toward the straggling town but along the Madison road toward the crest of the divide. There she turned

northward on a trail which followed the naked backbone of the Tobacco Roots to Rymer's Grove, two miles beyond the pass, where stood the only trees which had escaped the axes of the miners, who had cut every stick of timber large enough to furnish lumber for cabins and sluiciboxes or wood for the cooking fires. Old Jed Rymer, quite unintentionally, had saved those pines. He had come to the Gulch on the heels of the first rush and had staked and recorded the area as a mining claim. There was no water at the spot nor any sign of mineral-bearing outcropping; but the miners had respected his claim to the worthless site, and he had built a lean-to cabin and settled down to his business of hunter, shooting deer and elk and bear and selling the meat to the gold-seekers. Old Rymer was one of a group which had almost vanished from the mountains, the free trappers. He was very old: old enough to justify his claim that he had been with Andrew Henry when that organizer of the Missouri Fur Company had built a fort on Henry's Fork of the Snake in 1810. His speech was larded with words from a dozen Indian tongues and with strange mongrel French oaths learned from *voyageurs* and *bivernants* of the Hudson's Bay Company, and he told strange and unbelievable tales of the mysterious regions about the head of the Yellowstone and the "spoutin' hot springs" there. He had endured the hurly-burly of Alder Gulch for only a few months and in October of '63 had offered his worthless claim to Jesse Minor for two hundred dollars. The lumber in the tall pines was worth three times that sum; but the trees were still standing when Ann reached Virginia City, and she had made Jesse promise never to cut them. She had wanted their home to be built among them and had yielded reluctantly to the less exposed site on the western slope. Here, beneath the pines, the placers and the noisy industry of the Gulch were far away. Here were silence and an approximation of peace, and here Jesse rode to find her. He dropped his horse's reins and let the animal graze beside the stallion, then walked to where Ann sat on the flat rock which had been the doorsill of

the old trapper's cabin. She leaned back against the strong support of his knees, and he took and held the hand she raised.

"You shouldn't have done it, Ann," he said at last. "You know Dr. Bissell told you—"

"I know, but somebody had to do something, Jesse. Biedler was going to hang that young man. His name is Jeff Crittenden, and I know him—he crossed the Plains with us."

"Yes. The Mormon elder—Medbridge—was a friend of yours, too."

"How did you know that?"

"I don't often forget a name I've once heard, Ann, and you named both those men to me. You thought Medbridge was a good man in spite of his being a Mormon elder."

"I did think that. When my father was so sick I thought I'd never known a kinder man. And now—why, Jesse, he as good as told Biedler to go ahead and hang poor Jeff Crittenden. And he dared to stop me and talk to me, and he quoted that Bible verse about cutting off your right hand if it offends you. And what's more—please let me finish, Jesse—he's a polygamist. He told me that he had two wives and that each of them had borne him a child—and yet, when he told me in Salt Lake City that his mother had made a plural marriage or whatever they call it, he was almost heartbroken. He said he didn't believe in polygamy even if the Church did and that he could never, never love more than one woman. And inside of two years—"

"Yes, poor devil," said Jesse compassionately.

"You're sorry for him! How can you be?"

"Because he got trapped. Brigham and the apostles trapped him as they've trapped hundreds of poor devils since they came out openly with the polygamy doctrine. If he could have broken away and apostatized—but he couldn't and didn't. Maybe his faith was too strong, and maybe he was afraid of what might happen to him if he started for California. Maybe he stayed for his mother's sake or because he thought a man could be a Mormon elder and still call his soul his own."

"He was just weak," Ann said stubbornly. "I never expected to hear you defending a man who didn't have courage enough

to say no. Of course, now that he is one of them, he defends polygamy and calls it religion."

"Of course." Jesse laughed bitterly. "That's where the trap really closes down on a man. I lived there for weeks, Ann, and I know what I'm talking about. There are hundreds of Medbridges in Utah who got steered into polygamy by one means or another, and now they and their children and their grandchildren will be Mormons. The church came mighty near going to pieces after Joe Smith was killed, and it might do the same thing after old Brigham dies except for polygamy. That'll hold 'em. The son of a plural wife will never regard his mother as a willing concubine or himself as a bastard. It's just politics, but it will always be religion to the Mormons; and you'd never get the Gentile preachers to see it as anything else but a foul and immoral doctrine. That's why I'm sorry for Medbridge. He knows he's trapped, but what can he do about it short of letting Old Port Rockwell cut his throat? He came out here believing that Joseph Smith was a prophet of God and that Brigham stood only half a step lower—and he finds that Brigham is a shrewd Yankee politician with no more saintliness in him than there is in that stud yonder. He can't renounce Joseph Smith, and he can't stomach Brigham, and he knows he's trapped by polygamy. Isn't there something in Scripture about asking for bread and receiving a stone? That's what the Old Boss has done to fellows like Medbridge."

She made room for him beside her on the slab.

"You're sorry for him, and I'm not," she said. "Maybe it's just the woman's way of looking at it, but it was horrible to learn that a man I respected had become a polygamist and was taking turns living with two different women. Jeff Crittenden was a thief, but at least he wasn't false to himself."

"I see what you mean. Crittenden's back will heal, but Medbridge—"

"He's lost God. I know now. While I stood there with Thomas Medbridge in the hotel that awful Biedler was whipping Crittenden, and I heard him scream. He screamed 'My God! Oh, my God!' over and over. It was awful to hear; but he had a God

to call on, and Elder Medbridge hasn't. They were both weak."

"This country can make or break a man mighty quick, Ann. If Medbridge hadn't come to Utah he'd never have been chivvied into polygamy. And if Crittenden had gone on to California instead of hanging around Fort Hall—"

"Tell me about him, Jesse—Crittenden, I mean. What happened after . . ."

"He put on his shirt and coat and set off down the gulch alone. He'd gone by the time I got there; but I had a word or two with Jim Williams, and when I heard his name I took out after him."

"Why did you do that?"

"You'd known him, my dear, and you'd saved him from hanging; so I thought I'd see that he was taken care of and give him the price of a stage ticket to wherever he might want to go."

"And you found him?"

"Yes. I found him in a little shack where that Indian girl lives whose husband was hanged with Red Yeager at Laurin's ranch. Brown, his name was. He ran the ferry on Snake River before coming up here. The girl—she can talk English pretty well—told me she'd found him sitting on a stone beside the road and blubbering about having been whipped like a nigger. By the time I got there she'd taken his clothes off and was bathing his back and kind of half talking and half singing to him in Sioux. I wish I knew what she was saying. It sounded like the talk a woman might make if she'd lost her man and found him again. She'll take care of him all right."

"You've got to do something for me, Jesse. I'd do it myself; but I know Jeff recognized me, and I don't think he'd want to see me again."

"He wouldn't. I can tell you that. No man would want to face a girl who knew he'd been spreadeagled on a wagonwheel and lashed for stealing."

So that's what they did to him. "The horse Mrs. Slade gave me used to be his—you know that, Jesse. Well, tomorrow I want you to take Jupe back to him. Give him the bill of sale and

everything and give him some money, too, and don't let him know where it came from. Will you do that?"

He nodded, and they sat for some minutes, quietly watching the shadows deepen in the valley and the line of sunlight climb closer to the summit of the peaks beyond the Madison. He felt her shoulder quiver.

"Cold, Ann? Maybe we'd better be going. . . ."

"I'm not cold, really; let's sit here a little longer. Jesse, if we rode straight ahead"—she pointed to the eastward—"how far would it be to the next town?"

"God knows," Jesse retorted cheerfully. "You'd find a few settlers and prospectors over in the Gallatin Valley; but after them there's nothing until you hit Fort Union at the mouth of the Yellowstone, and that's a long way north of where you're pointing."

"And then?"

"Still nothing. A few forts and trading posts along the Missouri in Dakota, but you couldn't call them towns even if there are a few squawmen and such settling around places like Fort Pierre. None of that country has begun to be opened up yet, and it won't be for a good many years. If you kept on going down the Missouri you'd hit Yankton—that's a town—and Omaha City a little above the mouth of the Platte. From there on you're in civilization. It's a fairly big country, Ann."

Yes, she breathed softly to herself, it was big, this land. As he spoke her spirit leaped eastward over the hundreds of leagues embraced in his careless remarks, over mountains still unexplored and wide valleys that were waiting for the plow. It was a big land. There was room there for the miner and the stock-raiser, for farmer and lumberman, for trader and freighter, and for towns and hamlets beyond all counting. There was room for the strong and the weak, for Jesse Minor and James Williams and Wilbur Sanders as well as for Thomas Medbridge and Jeff Crittenden. There was room even for the Biedlers, for new lands were cruel and harsh. Only the Plummers and the Helms and the Rays could not be permitted to survive. They were

destroyers, and they must themselves be destroyed. Slowly the pattern of the last two years took form and definite outline. All had been for a purpose, and the warp-threads of destiny had been strung before the weft of her life and Jesse's and Clem Talbot's and Henry Plummer's and all those others had been woven one with the other. This was her land, all of it, from the Ohio of her birth to this mountain crest in the new territory. It was her land, hers and the children which would come after her. Please God the child she bore within her now would not squander his heritage.

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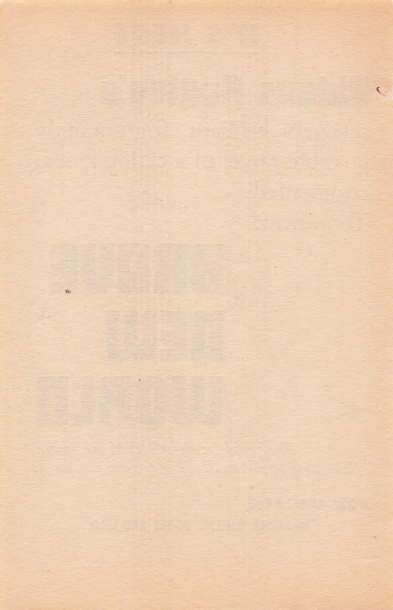
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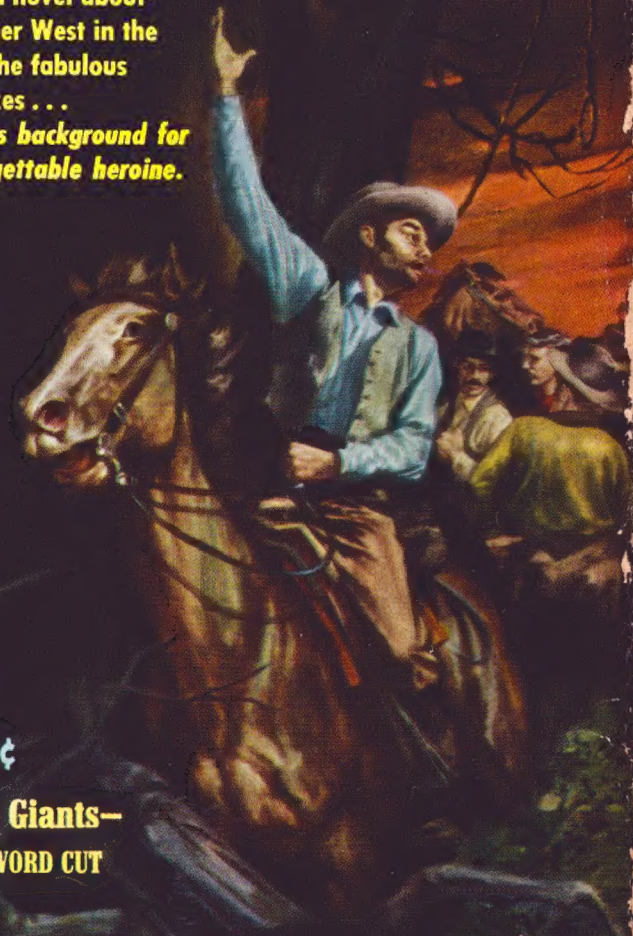
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